

”Being Humble and Enduring Enough”

An exploration of The Hunter’s Place in Nature In William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*

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Samandrag

Denne oppgåva er interessert i å undersøke korleis stad, natur og jakt blir brukt i boka *Go Down, Moses* av William Faulkner. Til dette formålet kjem eg til å nytta eit utval historiar frå boka, nemleg ”The Old People”, ”The Bear” og ”Delta Autumn”. Eg kjem til å dele oppgåva inn i tre kapitlar, og det vil vera eit tyngande fokus på karakteren Isaac ’Ike’ McCaslin.

I det første kapitlet vil eg gjennom ein lesnad av desse historia undersøkje korleis ein byggjar opp ein god kjensle av stad i fiksjon, i tillegg til at eg ser på korleis Faulkner sjølv oppnår dette. I det andre kapitlet vil eg undersøke korleis Faulkner brukar natur i historia hans, og korleis natur kan nyttast for å gjere greie for kva rolle Faulkner sine karakterar har i historia og mellom kvarandre. Eit viktig spørsmål er korleis dei motseiande holdningane til naturvern og naturbruk har ein innverknad på karakterane. Til slutt vil eg fokusera på jakt og kva rolle jakt har i historia. Eg vil her blant anna undersøka i kor stor grad det er ”rett” at jegarane i historia jaktar på ”Old Ben”, den største og eldste bjørnen i skogen. Eit spesielt fokus vil vera korleis måten dei ulike karakterane jaktar på kan vera med på å beskrive deira forhold til natur.

Den overhengande forståelsen er at ein må ha ein god tilknytning og forhold til naturen for å kunne vera ein jegar i Faulkner sine skogar, og at rollane til karakterane er i stor grad avhengig av deira tilknytning til naturen.

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Introduction

You write a story to tell about people, man in his constant struggle with his own heart, with the hearts of others, or with his environment. It's man in the ageless, eternal struggles which we inherit and we go through as though they'd never happened before, shown for a moment in a dramatic instant of the furious motion of being alive, that's all any story is. You catch the fluidity which is human life and you focus a light on it and you stop it long enough for people to be able to see it. (Faulkner in the University)

During my readings I have noticed that American southern literature in particular often gives expression to a sense of respect and closeness to the rural environment and nature. A literature that is based on and exudes the spirit of a region with values emphasizing a close connection with the natural landscape, community and hard work. These notions are particularly present in the works of William Faulkner. He represents a selection of writing that I identify as typically southern, and it is certain aspects of this “southernness” that I have chosen to explore, using his short story composite *Go Down, Moses* (1942). William Faulkner is a name that is often mentioned in the same breath as American southern literature. With a Nobel prize in literature and two Pulitzer prizes, he is revered by many as a prominent author of American Southern literature. His contemporaries seemed to share these sentiments, Eudora Welty liking him to a giant and his works to comets, while Flannery O'Connor sets him as the norm for good writing, encouraging fellow southern writers not to “stall his mule and wagon on the same track the Dixie Limited is roaring down” (818). He is known for dealing with themes of a dark nature, the struggles of the heart, his writings echoing those of his nineteenth century predecessor, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Raised in a region of America that after the Civil

War was split between North and South, old and new, between tradition and finding a new life for oneself, his characters exhibit a similar split. Flannery O'Connor expressed that southern authors had a penchant for writing about what she called "freaks", characters that seem strange and alien. She argued that one of the things that made southern authors unique was this ability to still be able to recognize a freak. As she put it, "To be able to recognize a freak, you have to have some conception of the whole man" (817). Although she understood the concept of the whole man to mainly derive from some theological source, she was reluctant to say that southerners were still firm in their faith in Christ, and instead settled for claiming the South to be "Christ-haunted". It is the prevalence of ghosts in the South that enables writers to have this duality, this discrepancy in style between the tragic and the comic, between the old and the new. In *Go Down, Moses*, this break between the old and the new is most apparent in Isaac 'Ike' McCaslin, a young man who wishes to break from his bloodline by retreating into nature.

Although Faulkner certainly shares an affinity for the tragic story with Hawthorne, it would be too convenient to set him down as a writer of tragedies. And although he certainly places a great deal of emphasis on The South, it would be too simplistic to call him a regionalist writer. One can agree that there are certain themes that reappear, such as nature, race, shame and so on, but determining a specific genre or theme seems an impossible task. Although *Go Down, Moses* offers a wealth of material and different themes to discuss, I will be focusing on the topics of place, nature and hunting, devoting one chapter to each.

Faulkner's genius lies in having all these elements that we can point to and identify as something familiar and, perhaps, typically "southern", and still retaining an ineffable and mystical quality throughout. If one must label him as something, the title of Southern storyteller would be fitting. Perhaps because, if we take O'Connor's word for it, they are haunted by ghosts of the past, and ghosts make for interesting stories to tell. For Faulkner, the

story worth telling is found within a person, not necessarily the acts they commit. The situations his characters find themselves in are merely set stages, if not traps, for them to surface their inner thoughts, feelings and strife. As he said when addressing a class at the University of Mississippi, any story is really about capturing “(...) man in the ageless, eternal struggles which we inherit and we go through as though they'd never happened before, shown for a moment in a dramatic instant of the furious motion of being alive” (Faulkner in the University). There is one thing in these words that particularly stand out as being typical for Faulkner, the concept of inherited struggle. It is from here he draws out the multitudes that make categorizing him difficult. Honor, guilt, tradition, these are the ghosts that are inherited and continue to haunt his characters. They are haunted by the southern past, inheriting the sins of their fathers, they suffer from a discrepancy between what is and always has been and the desire to change one's fate.

The concept of inheritance is central in *Go Down, Moses*, where so much of the content is contingent upon Isaac "Ike" McCaslin's, one of the principal characters of the story, inherited past sin: “the old haught ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame, descended to him” (107). The bloodlines of the McCaslins are dark, myriad and difficult to order, but luckily the University of Virginia offers a good overview of the McCaslin genealogy.¹ Isaac is a character who is fraught with inner tension from possessing dueling attractions within him, one of these being a desire to repudiate his McCaslin heritage, yet still being drawn towards it because of the environment he is in. He tries to escape to nature through participating in a yearly November hunt, ultimately finding himself unable to belong both to nature and to

¹ <http://people.virginia.edu/~sfr/FAULKNER/09gdmgen.html>

civilization. This wish to alter one's place in life brings to mind what it means to be rooted somewhere, and how a sense of place can be meaningful to a person.

I have taken the title of my thesis, "Being Humble and Enduring Enough" from the beginning of the story "The Bear". Humility and endurance are the qualities that the hunters must possess if they wish to interact genuinely with the forest in "The Bear", and the overarching virtues of *Go Down, Moses* as a whole. For my discussions, I will be focusing on what is often referred to as the hunting narrative, which consists of the stories of *Go Down, Moses* that follow Isaac and the hunting party. This narrative is made up of the stories "The Old People", "The Bear" and "Delta Autumn". The stories are set around the 1880's in the bottom wilderness of the Tallahatchie River in the northern part of Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. Isaac is raised in this environment of slave-holders and hunters, eventually becoming part of a hunting party whose primary members consist of: Major de Spain, who owns the camp and the surrounding land; General Quentin Compson, a former Confederate officer and a member of a prominent family in the county; McCaslin Edmonds, the young operator of a 2,000-acre plantation and Isaac's much older cousin; Walter Ewell, a prominent woodsman and hunter who never misses; Sam Fathers, an old man who is the son of a quadroon slave woman and part Chickasaw Indian; Boon Hogganbeck, a large but clumsy man-child deadly loyal to Major de Spain and General Compson and finally Lion, the half-wild and half-tame mongrel dog that Sam Fathers brings into camp. Every November, they would leave the town and travel deep into the wilderness to hunt. On the last day of every hunting trip, they would attempt to track down the great bear they call Old Ben, an almost mythical creature of the forest. Finally, they manage to kill the bear, but it is not the most skilled or prominent members among the group that manages to kill him, but the clumsy Boon Hogganbeck and the mongrel dog Lion. Why does Faulkner paint such an unworthy

death for such a powerful animal, an animal that stands as a representation of nature? And why, specifically, is it Boon Hogganbeck and Lion that completes this task? Being humble and enduring are the qualities that the wilderness uses to measure a man's worthiness as a hunter, but what is the significance of these values? These are some of the central questions I will attempt to answer.

Faulkner often takes great liberties with his handling of narrative perspective, particularly with what traditionally has been called third-person limited point of view. Most often we see the stories of the hunting narrative through the eyes of Isaac. Although said in an interview with *The Paris Review* with respect to *The Sound and The Fury*, this may as well apply to Isaac of *Go Down, Moses*: "I had already begun to tell the story through the eyes of the idiot child, since I felt that it would be more effective as told by someone capable only of knowing what happened but not why". Isaac, as a young person, is indeed someone who knows what happens but does not know why. He seems unable to answer why he cannot seem to do anything to prevent the death of Old Ben and the destruction of the landscape. Being raised both in the civilized world as a McCaslin and in nature under the tutelage of the Chickasaw Indian Sam Fathers, why can Isaac not fully connect with nature the way he wishes to? This is a question that I have devoted a large part of this thesis to answer.

I have divided my discussion into three chapters, each dealing with different themes and in varying ways. The first chapter will discuss Southern literature, Faulkner and *Go Down, Moses* more generally in terms of a theoretical framework of place, the second chapter will examine nature more broadly in the hunting narrative, and finally the last chapter will focus more specifically on how hunting works in a natural context, employing a higher degree of close reading than the previous chapters.

The first chapter will be addressing the topic of place in fiction. Central here is the questions of what role place has in fiction, and to what extent place is relevant to talk about regarding Faulkner and *Go Down, Moses* in particular. Referring to Eudora Welty's "Place in Fiction" (1956) and Barry Lopez's "Landscape and Narrative" (1989), I will be examining how a good sense of place is developed in fiction. I will also be looking at Wallace Stegner's *Where The Bluebird Sings to The Lemonade Springs* (1986) to determine what effect place can have on a person. Throughout these questions I will be drawing from *Go Down, Moses* to show how Faulkner uses a sense of place in his stories.

The second chapter will deal with the subject of nature. Here the main focus is the different approaches to understanding how nature works in *Go Down, Moses*, and how it is used to drive the narrative and determine the characters' roles. The concept of a dueling attitude towards nature appreciation and nature exploration will be a key aspect of the discussion. I will also be looking at ecocriticism and examine to what extent *Go Down, Moses* voices environmental concerns.

The third and final chapter will discuss the topic of hunting. How is hunting performed, what can the different acts of hunting say about the characters' personalities and their overall role in the narrative? Are their motives for hunting different, and do these motives change as the stories progress? These questions, along with the overarching question of whether or not the hunting party is right in hunting for and killing Old Ben, will be the main questions this chapter will attempt to answer. I will also be looking at an alternative reading of the hunt for Old Ben provided by John Lydenberg in his article "Nature Myth in Faulkner's 'The Bear'" (1952).

CHAPTER ONE: THE PLACE FOR A FICTIONAL COUNTY

Introduction

“What place has place in fiction?” (116), Eudora Welty asks in her essay “Place in Fiction”. Although it is evident that a story must take place somewhere, the circumstances around creating a place for a story and the effect it produces is often overlooked, benched by the more immediate elements such as plot, character or theme. The old expression “there is no place like home” is true for most people, but perhaps even more so for the Southern author. With its turbulent and dark past, its landscape, vernacular and slew of unique authors faithful to their heritage, the reader of southern fiction will certainly agree that there is no place quite like the south, and in so agreeing, admit that place plays an important role.

It may seem tempting for the author to see place as merely a prerequisite for creating a background for their characters. One might find, though, that what is most memorable in a story is not necessarily what took place, but where the events unfolded. Place is more than just a medium through which a character can advance the plot of a story. When done right, a well-drawn sense of place can become equally as memorable and impacting as good plot. When one thinks back to an old story that one loves, it is often the feeling of the place that remains, and not necessarily so much what took place there. Creating a place that appeals, that seems inviting and convincing, is what writers often struggle to achieve. The Big Bottom, the great woods found in the Tallahatchie within Faulkner’s fictional Yoknapatawpha County that stretches almost a hundred square miles large, is just such a place. But what is it about Faulkner’s fictional county, a region he in an interview with *The Paris Review* called his “own little postage stamp of native soil”, that makes it seem so real?

In this chapter I discuss the role and importance of place in fiction, using the ideas of Eudora Welty, Barry Lopez and Wallace Stegner as a framework for examining Faulkner’s

Go Down, Moses. The overarching question this chapter will discuss is to what extent place is relevant to talk about regarding Faulkner and *Go Down, Moses* in particular. The first part of this chapter will examine the creation and effect of place in fiction, using Eudora Welty's essay "Place in Fiction" and Barry Lopez's article "Landscape and Narrative" to discuss Faulkner's development of place. The latter part will to some extent examine the stories of *Go Down, Moses* themselves and how Faulkner's usage of place contributes to their depth, referring to Wallace Stegner's *Where The Bluebird Sings to The Lemonade Springs*. Finally, I will attempt to identify some of the distinct places we can find in the stories and examine what it is that sets them apart from one another. The main point of investigation is how Faulkner makes clear that the reader leaves one place and enters another, in particular how he separates nature from the domain of man and to what degree these places overlap. To the extent that it has proven possible, I have tried to separate place from nature, as this will be my key focus in the following chapter.

Eudora Welty's "Goodness of Place"

As a writer of fiction, Eudora Welty pays much attention to what works and what does not in fiction. In "Place in Fiction", Welty points to three elements—three different qualities of "goodness"—that pertain to the establishment of place in fiction. These three elements are signs of what makes good writing, and what makes a good writer. The term "goodness" is tinged with some of that southern charm and is derived from a quote she includes from Henry James where he stated that there are only two kinds of novels: the good and the bad (116). She attempts to discern certain qualities within the writing and the author that produces good fiction, and discovers three elements that she finds is imbued with their own "goodness".

The first "goodness" of validity pertains to the raw material of writing. It is the real world "out there" that a person can touch or see with their own eyes and feel with their

fingers. It is the physical, recognizable element that the reader is familiar with, and its function is to be a reference point to its fictional representation; it is the thing that is before fiction is made. The second “goodness” is the writing itself—“the achieved world of appearance”. It is the image, the place, that the author has made up and presented to the reader based on the raw material. The crucial thing here is that it must be believable, not straying too far from reality to be valid yet still being a work of fiction. A story may well be wholly fictitious, but it must still adhere to the basic laws of nature and logical scrutiny. This is where the worth of the author's ability to make a story is presented, “through which the novelist has his whole say and puts his whole case” (117). It is what the writer presents to the reader, the book you hold in your hands. The third has to do with the “worth” in the author himself—his aptitude as writer. It is his roots as a person and his experience as a writer, as well as the memories of his childhood home and native place. It is this that is the authors base of reference, his perspective, the proving ground for the author's fantasy, the departure point for his feelings and thoughts before they are focalized into fiction. A writer's work is always in some way a reflection of the writer, and the writer is always in some way a reflection of his place.

These “goodnesses” can be seen as happening almost as a process, where the author will draw validity from describing the real world and present a fanciful yet plausible fictional place, processed through and containing elements of the author's own native place, experience and point of view. Through this process, a work of fiction is produced, a story told that the reader will listen to, hopefully without much protest. It is also a statement about the quality of the work being directly tied to the quality of the author, and that the writer's quality, in turn, is shaped by place, “the experience out of which he writes”. To Welty, it is not necessarily a well-made description of the country itself that is important. The challenge is to present an image of a country that is believable and speaks to the reader, yet retains some ineffable and

personal piece of the writer as well. “Art, though, is never the voice of a country; it is an even more precious thing, the voice of the individual, doing its best to speak, not comfort of any sort, indeed, but the truth” (117).

Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* is not shy of the truth, of attempting to discern human nature and how it shapes ourselves and our environments. When Faulkner addressed a class at the University of Mississippi in the spring of 1947, he was asked why he presented an image of his area in his stories the way he did, to which he replied: “I have seen no other. I try to tell the truth of man. I use imagination when I have to and cruelty as a last resort. The area is incidental. That’s just all I know.” Faulkner surely takes to heart the three “goodnesses” that Welty puts forth as necessary for good fiction. By his own admission, Faulkner draws his inspiration for *Go Down, Moses* from his local environment of Oxford, Mississippi, the first “goodness” of validity. For the second goodness of the writing itself, of making the landscape seem believable to the reader, Faulkner’s landscapes are known for being vivid and seemingly unending, his fictional Yoknapatawpha County a standing testament to this. During an interview with *The Paris Review* in 1956, he admitted that he “would never live long enough to exhaust it”. As for the third “goodness”, the worth of the author himself, Faulkner was considered by many of his peers, Eudora Welty and Flannery O’Connor to name a few, as one of the most important writers to have come from the South. His stories are most certainly a reflection of himself as a Southerner, and through these experiences he has managed to create an image of the South in his stories that show a region so real that it continues to live off and outside the printed page. There is one particular instance in “The Old People” where Faulkner uses his knowledge of his local environment in order to render a scene that beautifully describes the transition from the forest to the domain of man:

Then they would emerge, they would be out of it, the line as sharp as the demarcation of a doored wall. Suddenly skeleton cotton- and corn-fields would flow away on either hand, gaunt and motionless beneath the gray rain; there would be a house, barns, fences, where the hand of man had clawed for an instant, holding, the wall of the wilderness behind them now, tremendous and still and seemingly impenetrable in the gray fading light, the very thin orifice through which they had emerged apparently swallowed up. (168)

In a separate but similar instance in “The Bear”, he uses a description of the landscape in such a way that the reader gets a real sense of man being dwarfed when compared to nature, this time the surrey moving from the domain of man to enter the forest:

–the tall and endless wall of dense November woods under the dissolving afternoon and the year’s death, sombre, impenetrable (...) the surrey moving through the skeleton stalks of cotton and corn in the last of open country, the last trace of man’s puny gnawing at the immemorial flank, until dwarfed by that perspective into an almost ridiculous diminishment. (184-85)

Barry Lopez’s Landscapes

Welty is certainly not alone in discussing the importance of place in fiction. Barry Lopez is a creative writer who is also known as a nature writer. The aspect of nature and how it connects to storytelling is something he ties to a well-established sense of place. This is true in his essay “Landscape and Narrative”. Although he ties place more closely up to a function of

narrative, he seems to be equally concerned with the importance of place in fiction and how it describes landscape, and is expressed through it.

The departure point of his reflections on narrative is his experiences in Alaska, where he spent time with Alaskan storytellers and attempts to understand how they were able to create stories that, to him, were utterly captivating. Their vivid descriptions of wolverines in the landscape seemed lifelike, without being gratuitous, and brought everything around him to life. He then goes on to theorize about the process and the nature of creating a story and its connection to the landscape. To a nature writer, place becomes a crucial tool of the trade and where the writer has his say.

He says that any storyteller, or really anyone who listens to stories, possesses an internal and an external landscape. (64) The external landscape can be thought of as an outer objective reality, what a person may see and hear and feel, like watching a bird pull an earthworm out of the ground—what Welty might have thought to be the goodness of validity, the raw material of writing. The internal landscape is the subjective experience of these outer experiences, the sum of experiences the person has acquired through touch, smell and sight. He conceptualizes these parts as landscapes because they are far apart, separated by the experiencer, although him being a nature writer, the natural connotation of landscapes seems fitting. It is the internal landscape that stores the familiar names for the things that exist in the external landscape, and the process of creating a balance between the external and internal landscapes creates harmony. The goal is to reach a harmony between the landscapes, and this is achieved when there is a high degree of correspondence between the sense experience of the external landscape and the projection of the inner landscape in a person's mind.

When harmony between the landscapes is achieved, a person can project this understanding outward, in the form of a story. The job of a good storyteller according to Lopez is to “engage the reader with a precise vocabulary, to set forth a coherent and dramatic

rendering of incidents—and to be ingenuous” (66). If done right, a well-told story can make the reader or listener experience “a profound sense of well-being” (66). It is the bringing together of the two landscapes, the interior and the exterior, that produces this effect. Both the storyteller and the listener “undertakes to order his interior landscape according to the exterior landscape”, and “To succeed in this means to achieve a balanced state of mental health” (67). This “balanced state of mental health” is what good storytelling manages to do. It is the story that expresses not only an outer and objective landscape, but includes pieces of the inner thoughts of the storyteller, and produces a positive effect on the reader.

Lopez, unlike Welty, is not concerned with deciphering what makes good writing, at least not directly, but is more curious about reflecting on his encounters with Alaskan storytellers and the nature of the effect their stories had on him. Through this process he seems to adapt an empiricist philosophy as it pertains to the two landscapes; inner and outer. This dichotomy echoes the statement “perception before conception”, meaning all understanding must come through the senses; an outer landscape does not “exist” before it is observed, felt, touched and processed through the senses and it can be properly understood. Before you can understand something, you must experience it. You must see the landscape before you can make a story out of it. The inner landscape contains elements of the outer, and in turn makes for a good story. The interior landscape is “a kind of projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape” (65).

It is also interesting to note that Lopez has an idea of experiences combining or synergizing to make new and more profound experiences. This is what he found in Alaska when he encountered the storytellers. Before he heard the stories, the landscape was indeed beautiful. The next day, after having heard stories about the wildlife in the landscape and the Alaskan storytellers' descriptions of the wild, the landscape seemed different, like it had a new

quality to it: “The landscape seemed alive because of the stories” (63). Stories do not simply come from the landscape, but shape the actual existing landscape. This is an example of the connection between the inner and outer landscapes. The outer and inner landscapes are separate, but the rendering of landscape in a story has an effect on the reader or listener, who sees the landscape in a new way.

In the case of Faulkner, and in particular *Go Down, Moses*, it seems like there is little left to the imagination as Faulkner seems to have borrowed much of the material from his local environment, forming his inner landscape. Charles S. Aiken points out a multitude of similarities between *Go Down, Moses*, particularly in the stories “The Bear” and “Delta Autumn”, and Faulkner's home town in his article “A Geographical Approach to William Faulkner's 'The Bear'” (1981). There is a point in story where the hunting party has to postpone their annual chase of Old Ben due to unusually cold weather, and having emptied their supply of whiskey while waiting for it to clear, Boon Hogganbeck and Isaac McCaslin board a log train that takes them from camp to Memphis. When superimposing a map of Faulkner's train line over the actual train line from Lafayette County where Faulkner grew up, there is a real resemblance (445). According to *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* Vol. 2, his great-grandfather was a colonel in the Civil War and a railroad builder, among other things (Norton 1040). Faulkner's father, Murry, worked for the railroad as well, but was a reclusive man who loved to hunt and drink and swap stories with his hunting friends (Norton 1040). Furthermore, similar to Isaac McCaslin, Faulkner himself was from a young age very keen on hunting with his father. Curiously, Aiken points out, “The site of De Spain's camp in fictional Yoknapatawpha occupies approximately the location in Lafayette County of the Cain plantation that Murry liked to visit” (447).

Although both Welty and Lopez dwell on the importance of good storytelling through a well-established sense of place, Welty is not as concerned with how a story produces a “balanced state of health”, as Lopez does, so much as finding out what makes the place of a story seem genuine. Of course, their ideas do not overlap completely as they write with different interests and come from somewhat different “landscapes”, but their adherence and connection to a sense of place permits similarities between them seep through. Like Lopez, Welty stresses the importance of art as a mediator of truth and assures that “the art that speaks it most unmistakably, most directly, most variously, most fully, is fiction; in particular, the novel” (117). The reader may note that while Lopez is more focused on the outer and inner landscapes within the storyteller, Welty seems to be more interested in how a story is received, “as place has functioned between the writer and his material, so it functions between the writer and the reader” (128). A story well told forms a bond between the storyteller and the reader, and, “Location is the ground conductor of all the currents of emotion and belief and moral conviction that charge out from the story in its course” (128). Place is what ties everything together and creates order.

Wallace Stegner and Being “Rooted”

When Welty and Lopez both speak about different aspects of how place is important, it is from the perspective of narrative. Welty addresses the technique for good writing on place, and Lopez attempts to explain how good storytelling is connected to perception, conception and projection of external and internal landscapes. Wallace Stegner, although not overtly expressing any direct theoretical focus on place, writes much about the strong effect place can have on a personal level. He talks about how his father was shaped by place, or lack thereof, and seems to express a feeling of him not being a whole man for not having a place in the world. Isaac McCaslin suffers from the very same lack of place in the hunting narrative of *Go*

Down, Moses. Being torn between a belonging to nature and being born into the slave-holding and cursed bloodline of the McCaslins, he belongs to neither civilization nor nature fully, being essentially rootless in his community.

The novel *Where The Bluebird Sings to The Lemonade Springs* seems to have been written with his father fresh in mind. Because Stegner is a westerner, he does not focus on the South and nature as much as Welty and Lopez, but that does not mean he does not comment on the importance of place to an equal degree. The West is his territory, and he comments on western optimism and enterprise. In the introduction to his book, he talks much about place, but it is the lack of place, the constant moving from one place to another. Its focus is on Stegner's father and his constant search for a bonanza, his landless wanderings in between it all. This was a time when western expansion was at its height, when vast cities were forming on America's west coast, when promises of wealth and promise to whomever went there permeated the literature of the time. Of course, reality was not as promising, but as Stegner comments, "If you believe that the world owes you not merely a living but a bonanza, then restrictive laws are only an irritation and a challenge" (xxv).

This attitude and his father's constant search for his bonanza says something about what kind of person it is that does not have a home, that such a person would be, in some way, impaired. Such a person wanders with the wind looking for success, and is in the whole tinged with Stegner's thoughts on land usage and the importance of place. Isaac McCaslin, in his restlessness and wish to change his place, is reminiscent of Stegner's father in this way, although his wandering is not so much westward as it is towards the forests of The Big Bottom. When Stegner's father passed away part of his inheritance included "deeds to several patches of Nevada gravel and mountainside" that he saw not as assets but as "wry reminders" (xxvi). These sentiments seem to reflect some of Major do Spain's as well, the main figure of enterprise in *Go Down, Moses*, who first leases the hunting rights to The Big Bottom after the

death of Old Ben, then sells it away all together when he is bored of it in order to make a profit off the land.

The topic of place is treated more directly in Stegner's chapter "The Sense of Place". He begins it by introducing Wendell Berry, a well-known environmentalist and fiction writer, and echoes his known quote that "If you don't know where you are (...) you don't know *who* you are" (199). Stegner describes Berry, by his own words, as a "placed" person, and reasons that if a person can be "placed", then there must be others that can be designated as the opposite, the "displaced" person. This is the wanderer, the explorer, a person who is not interested in settling in Walden Ponds but looks to far horizons (119). Being adventurous and restless, they grew by the thousands after the frontier vanished: the "New World transient" (200). This person may be acquainted with many places, but is rooted in none. This rootlessness, Stegner says, seems to the placed person to show the symptoms of nutritional deficiency in the displaced man, "as if he suffered from some obscure scurvy or pellagra of the soul" (200). Stegner's earlier recollection of the transient nature of his father in the back of our heads, one cannot help but wonder if his meandering personality suggests he would belong with the displaced millions as well. He admits that he was "born on wheels", feeling the "dissatisfaction and hunger that result from placelessness". The towns they passed when he was a child were "only the raw material of places", as he was "the raw material of a person" (201).

From this transient childhood, Stegner finds his own expanded formulation of the relationship between people and place, similar in spirit to Wendell Berry: "a place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, lived in it, known it, died in it—have both experienced and shaped it, as individuals, families, neighborhoods, and communities, over more than one generation" (201). People are not only shaped by place, but

place, in turn, is shaped by people: “No place is a place until things that have happened in it are remembered in history, ballads, yarns, legends, or monuments” (202). The Big Bottom in *Go Down, Moses* is, throughout the stories, irrevocably shaped by its denizens. The slow but steady deforestation is one of the main concerns in the story “The Bear”, where Isaac McCaslin connects with nature and wishes to preserve it and its guardian, the great bear named Old Ben, from the hunters that aim to kill it. The understanding of place that Wendell Berry identifies is not present throughout much of the western expansion due to its transient nature. The temporary mining towns existed only for as long as the earth would yield valuable metals, and were swiftly abandoned afterwards, leaving shrill ghost towns in the wake of the gold rush. There is indeed a wealth of literature about these types of towns, but as Stegner notices, what “*has* been written is a literature of motion, not of place” (203).

Another component to place and being rooted is memory, a connection to the land tied to history or heritage. Stegner includes another quote from Wendell Berry, that “no place is a place until it has had a poet” (205). This is directly connected to the notion of place, memory and identity, and the poet specializes in knowing and expressing these kinds of memories. Poet is not to be understood as someone who simply writes poetry, but someone with great imagination and clarity who can describe and express the connections between things; between people and the land. One such poet was Robert Frost, who Stegner quotes: “The land was ours before we were the land's” (206). It resonates with a sense of spiritual commitment to the land that transcends time, a historical inevitability of people's need and desire to be rooted and, unfortunately, for some the right to use exhaust it. The increasing degree of nature exploitation as the stories progress in *Go Down, Moses* is one of the main concerns in the following chapter.

Place in Faulkner

Place can take many different shapes in fiction and serve many different purposes. It can have historical value, it can represent a character's home soil, or it can be a device to show attachment, or distance, to something. In *Go Down, Moses*, the subject of place is reflected in the land, and the ownership of it. It is also used as a means to show the passage of time, a change in attitudes as well as the change in seasons, and the way people treat land shows how they feel about the time that has passed and their heritage, as well as providing crucial insight into their personalities.

Faulkner manages to create an interesting reversal in the way people perceive nature and man depending on where their perspectives are. When Isaac McCaslin is outside the forest, before he has turned ten and is allowed to accompany the hunting party, he dreams that the forest is a place full of wild animals. However, when Isaac has come of age and is allowed to accompany the others, it is man who acts in a wild manner, and the animals in nature are the peaceful ones. For example, when the hunting party is chasing for the bear, Boon Hogganbeck is given a particularly wild and frantic description: "He whirled and ran up to them, wild-faced, and flung himself onto the mule behind the boy. 'That damn boat!' he cried. 'It's on the other side!'" (227). This is the complete opposite of a description of a deer that is escaping:

Then it saw them. And still it did not begin to run. It just stopped for an instant, taller than any man, looking at them; then its muscles suppld, gathered. It did not even alter its course, not fleeing, not even running, just moving with that winged and effortless ease with which deer move. (175)

Faulkner constructs a sense of place in his descriptions in such a manner that it is only when viewed from the outside that the forest and its denizens come across as wild. Upon crossing the threshold between the domain of nature and the domain of man, their descriptions are reversed.

Faulkner is renowned for creating a landscape that rests safe in the memory of the reader, his Yoknapatawpha County a standing testament to that. His characters tend to be so connected to their place that the plot is largely based on a character moving towards or away from their native place and heritage, Isaac McCaslin being one such character in his search for a true connection to nature and distancing himself from his McCaslin heritage. In the long fourth chapter of “The Bear”, Isaac goes through the old ledgers that belong to his grandfather and, after discovering the sins of his forefathers from using slaves and committing incestuous relationships, he repudiates his inheritance and chooses to aim for a simple life closer to nature. A comment Faulkner made in an interview with *The Paris Review* seems to reverberate some of the ideas of Welty and Lopez: “A writer is trying to create believable people in credible moving situations in the most moving way he can. Obviously he must use as one of his tools the environment which he knows”. When we think of place in Faulkner it is the quintessential southern landscape of his Yoknapatawpha county that stands out. A well-developed sense of place can elevate the quality of a story greatly. The county is a world of his creation which, had you not known it was entirely fiction on his part, you would believe it likely to house a Faulkner museum, possibly even earmarking it for a tourist expedition, but finding it exceedingly difficult to pinpoint on a state map. You would, however, be able to find several landmarks that would seem eerily familiar had you read *Go Down, Moses* beforehand. Faulkner seemed more than happy to borrow inspiration from his local Lafayette, Mississippi, in creating his fictional county, much of the local history and geography seeping through author and ink and onto published paper.

It is clear that Faulkner followed the old adage, “write what you know”. He managed to blend real aspects of his native Lafayette County with his imaginary Yoknapatawpha, creating a place that could easily have been more real than fancy. For this he received praise from Welty, congratulating his fictional County and holding the author up as “the triumphant example in America today of the mastery of place in fiction”. Hence, she continues, “Yoknapatawpha County, so supremely and exclusively and majestically and totally itself, is an everywhere,” and although she was referring to another work by Faulkner, “Spotted Horses,” it might apply to any story in *Go Down, Moses*. What is more, she claims, it “could happen tomorrow—that is one of its glories. It could happen today or tomorrow at any little crossroads hamlet in Mississippi” (126-27).

Furthermore, a sense of place in a story adds an extra challenge for a modernist author, such as Faulkner and many of his contemporaries. It seems simpler to create a damaged and broken character without a sense of place, family or culture to anchor them. In modern fiction especially it has been commonplace to leave much, if not most, of the work to the reader. When the reader is presented with nothing but a character's raw emotions and thoughts and left the challenge to decipher him, the author abandons his reader and leaves him naked in a world with no connection to anything. The characters have no backgrounds to shine against, and there are few landmarks to help the reader navigate through the story. Although Faulkner does indeed employ many of the modernist techniques such as stream of consciousness, the well-developed sense of place in his stories make it so that the reader is still able to orient himself throughout the stories.

Concerning the structure of the stories, David H. Evans notices an interesting detail in “The Bear” in his article “Taking the Place of Nature: ‘The Bear’ and the Incarnation of America” (1999). He argues that: “‘The Bear’ is dominated by the question of place.

Location, more than event, gives structure to the tale, and in particular the opposition between two places or spaces—the forest wilderness (...) and the ‘tamed land’“ (181). In particular, he notices this in the way that the five chapters of “The Bear” are structured: “Sections 1, 2, 3, and 5, set in the forest, surround the long central scene in section 4, set in the commissary, like woods encircling a cultivated field, so that the form of the story itself reflects its own thematic concerns” (101). This image is an interesting usage of place on Faulkner’s part because chapters one through three and five all take place in the forest, whereas the longer fourth chapter takes place back in the civilized place of man.

The Importance of a Region

In the context of place in fiction, it seems near at hand to think of “regional writings”. One might note that some southern authors, such as Eudora Welty and Michael Kowalewski, are not satisfied with calling themselves and their works “regional” because of the connotations this term has implied in the past. Why does a sense of place seem so dear a notion for the southern author, and why does the term “regional” not seem to cover this?

The USA is a country composed of many different people from many different lands, and so identifying and expressing an individual identity is important to people, both as a means of self-realization and to combat historical amnesia. One of many ways to create a common identity is through literature, and regional literature, in a narrow sense, is literature that can be said to come from a specific and more or less defined area, sharing many features with works within that area. However, a literature that permits us to identify it as unique or native to a specific place does not necessarily yield itself as easily to be classified, simply, as regional. In “Contemporary Regionalism” (2003), Michael Kowalewski writes that “The best American regional writing tends to be less about a place than *of* it, with a writer's central nervous system immersed in the local ecology, subcultures, hidden history, and spoken idioms

of a given location” (7). He draws on earlier stigma associated with the term which “often denoted small-press status and the chance of only local, sometimes uncritical, recognition. ‘Regional fiction at its best’ is a blurb emblazoned on any number of remaindered novels” (21). Echoing these sentiments, Eudora Welty recommends the young writer to write from where s/he has his roots. Although this could be viewed as encouraging regional writing, it is not a term she feels accurately describes what she means by writing from one's roots. To her, regional writing is a “careless term, as well as a condescending one, because what it does is fail to differentiate between the localized raw material of life and its outcome as art” (132). She stresses that it is a term pushed on the writer from the outside and “has no meaning for the insider who is doing the writing”, and how could it? He is only writing about all he has ever known. Whether it be regional or not, he is “simply writing about life” (132). Welty pushes it to the edge when she lists several writers that are known to have been described as “regionalist” and insists that any writing that stems from a region, then, would have to be regional, all the way to the authors of the books of the Old Testament.

In “To Market, to Market: ‘The Portable Faulkner’” (1987) by Cheryl Lester, she includes a comment that Faulkner makes to the editor of “The Portable Faulkner”, Malcolm Cowley, about his work being specific to one region:

I’m inclined to think that my material, the South, is not very important to me. I just happen to know it, and don’t have time in one life to learn another one and write at the same time. Though the one I know is probably as good as another, life is a phenomenon but not a novelty, the same frantic steeplechase toward nothing everywhere and man stinks the same stink no matter where in time. (391)

CHAPTER TWO: THE DOOMED WILDERNESS

Introduction

Faulkner is known for making stories that deal with a range of themes that all talk about man and his relation to men, himself or his environment. Although *Go Down, Moses* can be read to focus on several topics, the most prominent being nature, race and hunting, I feel there is a lot to be gained by training that focus on nature. The overall understanding of the stories seems to be that the way people treat nature, or mistreat it, is intimately linked to how they perceive the world.

This chapter will be focusing on the topic of nature. I will be looking at the way nature is treated in *Go Down, Moses*, in particular how the way the characters interact with nature contributes to molding their roles and personalities throughout the stories and also the dichotomy between nature preservation and nature dependence. A central theme in *Go Down, Moses* is the increasing exploitation of nature as the stories progress and the effect this has on the characters and the way they deal with it. There is a lot of potential symbolism in play in *Go Down, Moses*, and I will also be looking at other possible interpretations of nature and the characters' roles. One common understanding is that Old Ben, the largest and oldest bear in the forest, is the guardian spirit of the forest, and that his death marks the death of nature in The Big Bottom as well. I will also examine to what extent the stories voice environmental concerns. Although I will be focusing on the three stories that make up the hunting narrative of *Go Down, Moses*, "The Old People", "The Bear" and "Delta Autumn", a discussion of the act of hunting itself will be covered in the following chapter.

There is a very present demarcation in *Go Down, Moses*, particularly in the hunting narrative, between that which belongs to the domain of nature and that which belongs to the domain of man. A very strong feeling of guilt permeates *Go Down, Moses*, and much of the

inner tension the characters experience when interacting with nature is from possessing dueling attitudes of nature admiration and usage (if not misuse). An overall understanding is that humans' approach to nature is inherently dualistic, wanting both to save nature while still being dependent on it, creating a rift within the characters. Therefore, we must look at how the characters relate to nature and how this connection, or a lack of connection, affects them and the meaning of the book.

The more interesting characters are the ones that are somewhere in the middle of these territories, caught between nature and man. Of all the characters, Isaac "Ike" McCaslin's guilt rests the heaviest. He is an imperative subject of discussion as he is the only character that is present throughout the entire hunting narrative, spanning more than 60 years, making him a critical point of reference for exploring the change in man's relation to nature during that time. He is also the person most caught between these worlds, placing him in a valuable position to the reader as it makes him capable of observing things that the other characters cannot. The beginning of his split between the world of men and the world of nature is sparked in the blink of an eye: it happened the day he shot his first deer.

The Initiation

that morning something had happened to him: in less than a second he had ceased forever to be the child he was yesterday. Or perhaps that made no difference, perhaps even a city-bred man, let alone a child, could not have understood it; perhaps only a country-bred one could comprehend loving the life he spills. He began to shake again. (172-73)

The story starts moments before Isaac completes the final obstacle in his way to entering the ranks of the hunters and being included in the hunting party. At twelve years old, he is about to shoot his first deer. He had shot rabbits since the age of eight, but the time for shooting rabbits and possum has passed. With the careful instructing voice of Sam Fathers, his half-Chickasaw Indian and half-negro tutor, telling him to “shoot quick, and slow” (155) as he rests a comforting hand on his shoulder, he completes his trial. The whole event is carefully described, from a thorough, almost majestic, description of the deer moments before it is shot to the pounding of young Isaac’s chest after it is done, concluded by Sam Fathers dipping his hands in the warm blood and smearing it across the face of the young boy to complete his initiation. Young Isaac does not say a word, he simply follows his mentor’s directions and accepts his initiation “humbly and joyfully, with abnegation and with pride too; the hands, the touch, the first worthy blood which he had been found at last worthy to draw” (157).

The initiation of young Isaac is one of the most interesting scenes in the hunting narrative. “The Old People” is a relatively short story, being only about twenty pages long and unfolding within a day. The initiation scene is completed within the first two pages, yet there is a lot more going on under the surface. The smearing of blood on Isaac’s face by Sam Fathers, in addition to marking his transition to manhood and becoming worthy of taking his place among the other hunters, has a second and more interesting effect; a second initiation has taken place as well, an initiation that allows Isaac a closer connection to nature. Up until this final moment, Sam Fathers has been raising Isaac almost as a surrogate father, the symbolism behind Sam Father’s name becoming apparent when Sam teaches Isaac how to hunt with dignity according to the old ways ever since the age of eight, the same way he had taught Isaac’s much older cousin, McCaslin Edmonds. It is not simply by happenstance or coincidence that Sam Fathers is the one to teach the young McCaslin men how to hunt. In *Go Down, Moses*, the old Chickasaw people, or Native Americans in general, are granted

mystical powers when in the forest because their culture and traditions cause them to be so far removed from the “tainted” domain of the civilized white Southerner and closer to nature.

Faulkner renders Native Americans as an ancient race of “earth people”, and so imbue them with the power to communicate fully and purely with nature.

The shooting of his first deer and the smearing of blood on Isaac’s face is the final ritual overseen by Sam that completes the ancient tradition and instills Isaac with the wisdom of Sam’s Native American ancestors, whom he simply calls “the People”, the eponymous source of the story’s title. This awakens some kind of “sixth sense” within Isaac that sets him apart from the rest of the group, becoming the only one initiated to nature as well as the group of hunters. At times this grants him insight into things that will come to pass and also allows Isaac to experience the same mystic and spiritual things that Sam Fathers sees. It is the first concrete step that brings Isaac closer to nature, forming a connection that sparks a duality and inner struggle in him between a belonging to nature and to civilization.

The Spirit Animal

Upon their return to the town the same day after Isaac’s initiation, Boon suddenly shouts that he has seen a large deer. Major de Spain, with Sam’s counsel, decides that they split up, Sam and Isaac going in one direction and Boon and Walter Ewell another, the rest staying with the wagons. Sam and Isaac find a good position and wait, but after some time has passed they hear the flat clap of Walter Ewell’s rifle followed by his hunting horn blowing, signaling a kill. Assuming the deer has been shot, Isaac stands up and gets ready to leave, but Sam stops him and tells him to wait. Suddenly a large buck emerges from the brush. Isaac stops, “standing with Sam beside him now instead of behind him as Sam always stood”, and the buck passes them by twenty feet, “full and wild and unafraid”, as Sam raises his right arm at full length, palm-outward, saying in that old tongue: “Oleh, Chief (...) Grandfather” (175).

They do not shoot the deer, they simply watch it leave quickly but peacefully, then make their way towards the sound of Walter's horn. When they see him, he is standing over and looking down at the deer he shot, confused as to how such a small deer could have made those large tracks: "But just look at the track he was making. It's pretty near big as a cow's. If there were any more tracks here besides the ones he is laying in, I would swear there was another buck here that I never even saw" (175).

There are several things happening in this scene that show how Isaac's initiation has changed him. Firstly, the way Isaac and Sam are oriented when they encounter the large deer is indicative of Isaac's new and more mature status. Instead of crouching down behind him as he always does, Sam is standing beside Isaac for the first time as his equal. This may be because he has shot his deer and is now a hunter, but more than that, it is because Sam considers him an equal in that they share a special bond with nature following his initiation, finding it fitting to stand by his side as he shows him the big buck that will only safely reveal itself to the trusted initiated. It seems that the size of the animal the characters are allowed to interact with peacefully reflects their closeness to nature. Although Walter Ewell may be the best hunter among the group, the large buck does not show itself to him because he is not initiated according to the ways of "the old people" as Sam and Isaac are; he must settle for the small deer. Boon, although sharing some of the same Native American blood as Sam, does not see the deer properly either because after indulging too much of the white man's drink, whiskey, and following Major de Spain for so long, "the blood had run white since and Boon was a white man" (161). He is also denied the vision, being only allowed to catch a hesitant glimpse of it. Curiously, it is Boon who first spotted what he thought was a large buck and alerted the rest of the hunting party, suggesting that his Native American heritage, although thinned out over the generations, is enough to allow him glimpses of natural mysteries.

One might argue that in order to be in touch with nature, blood is not as important as the right behavior. Isaac would be the best example of this, considering his closeness to nature despite having no part of Native American blood in him and being a descendant of the McCaslin lineage. However, this limitation has been circumvented by being under the tutelage of Sam Fathers for years, the person who has the most Native American blood in the story. This does indeed bring him closer to nature, but it takes the ritual smearing of blood across his face, a symbolic blood to supersede his all too human blood, to allow him true access to nature and to Old Ben. Behavior is indeed an important aspect, but I believe that it is always trumped by blood. In the previous case of the spirit animal, I believe it could not have been Boon that first caught a glimpse of the deer before it ran away had he not had that sliver of Native American blood that is so important to his character. He surely does not behave in a way that is in harmony with nature considering his addiction to whiskey and close dependence on Major de Spain, the character who is arguably the most hostile towards nature among the hunting party members as the stories progress. Boon is another case in point that even a sliver of the “right” blood trumps poor behavior.

Sam Fathers and Old Ben

In *Go Down, Moses*, the favorability of a person is directly tied to how that person interacts with nature and the degree of closeness they have to it. “Favorability” here means a range of concepts, from having a positive demeanor or positive qualities, to being knowledgeable, to leading a seemingly full life (as far as living a “full life” is permitted in a novel by Faulkner) or simply having a feeling of being in control of one’s situation and being able to impact one’s environment. The people who are able to interact more genuinely with nature seem to also have a lesser degree of inner tension. All of the characters have some connection to each other or to nature, and determining a character’s connection to something or someone is to

determine their role in the narrative. In essence, a character's connections makes up their roles to a large extent. The question then becomes, why does Isaac possess such a high degree of tension and guilt when he is one of the people in the narrative closest to nature? Although Isaac is indeed closely connected to nature, it is hindered in that it is only established by proxy through his mentor, Sam Fathers. This means that Isaac, although evidently more in tune with nature than the other members of the hunting party, is not able to connect fully with nature. Isaac's duality is further aggravated by him having dual heritages that are stark contrasts: On the one hand he is to inherit the land of old Carothers McCaslin with the slaves, blood and guilt it carries with it. On the other, after he has become ten years old and first enters the forest, "provided he in his turn were humble and enduring enough (...) he had already inherited then, without ever having seen it, the big old bear" (182). To explore the nuances behind Isaac's capacity (or lack thereof) for interacting with nature, we must first examine the details behind his mentor's close connection to nature, and what exactly he transfers to Isaac.

Sam is one of the strongest characters in the story, being near all-knowing when they enter the forest where even Major de Spain must seek his counsel at times to make decisions. This is shown when they encounter the spirit animal, the large deer, in "The Old People". He is able not only to sense where the deer are located, but also what the best course of action is to approach them successfully. He is probably the best woodsman among the hunting party as well, and the first thing he taught Isaac was how to navigate through the forest without a compass or map, using only the skies and the flora according to the teachings of his ancestors. There are several instances in the stories where Sam seems to have almost mystical powers or an omniscient understanding of things, projecting an air of confidence around him suggesting he always knows the correct course of action. The source of Sam Father's powers is his Native American blood in addition to him following the traditions of his ancestors by living

close to nature. An understanding of Sam Fathers and the dynamics around him is important to understand how the way a character relates to nature affects them.

One thing that separates Sam Fathers apart from the others in the hunting group is his connection to Old Ben, the largest and most meaningful animal in *The Big Bottom*. He is the spirit of the forest in the form of an old bear. It is a common reading that in “The Bear”, Old Ben is nature incarnate, and anything the bear does or anything that happens to the bear is a larger metaphor for something happening to the forest as well. John Lydenberg works with this understanding to a large degree in “Nature Myth in Faulkner’s ‘The Bear’”, as well as Lawrence Buell in “Writing for an Endangered World” (2001). This reading is most evident in how the death of the bear in the story marks the beginning of the end of nature. In “The Old People” when Isaac is talking to his older cousin McCaslin Edmonds about Sam and questions him being held as a slave, his cousin tries to justify it to some degree by saying Sam is “Like an old lion or a bear in a cage” (159), directly likening him to Old Ben. There is also one quote about Old Ben that seems to apply just as well to Sam Fathers, both being “an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time” (183). The way the two live is also identical. After Joe Baker, a Native American slave to the McCaslin’s, dies, Sam Fathers performs an old ritual of burning his remains and says to (not asks) McCaslin Edmonds that he wants to live alone in the hunting camp in *The Big Bottom*, which Edmonds easily approves. It seem more like Sam is simply giving notice more than asking permission, showing the amount of autonomy given to him because of his Native American heritage. It is unclear exactly what the motivation behind Sam’s moving is, but one thing seems certain: he wants to be closer to nature. After moving to *The Big Bottom* to live, Sam and the bear are even more closely connected in that they are both the last of their kind: Sam the last

Chickasaw Indian (since Boon counts more as a white man), and Old Ben the last great bear. They both live solitary and alone.

Following his move, Sam becomes more in tune with nature than ever before. He is connected to Old Ben in such a profound manner that he is able to sense when Old Ben is near, and furthermore, the bear's motives and sometimes even seems to know its thoughts. All this is to say that Sam and Old Ben are closely connected, and this connection is what legitimizes Sam as a something close to a shaman, a mystical character who, at times, is granted near-prophetic visions and deeper understandings of things relating to the forest. It is because he lives so close to nature, so close to Old Ben, that he is allowed to communicate with nature in a way that the others are not. More than just a connection to nature and the ways of the old people, Sam has transferred this connection to the spirit of the forest to Isaac. It is important to realize that Isaac's ability to sense things when he is in the forest is derived from his connection to Old Ben, and that this connection, because it is mediated through Sam Fathers, is not a "complete" connection. Although Isaac was smeared with the animal's blood after he had shot his first deer, the blood supposedly instilled with the spirit and the knowledge of the "old people", it is not true blood. Unlike Sam Fathers, it is not blood that courses through his veins, it is a symbolic blood, a ritual that only initiates the young neophyte into the first circles of the mystics. It is enough to instill young Isaac with sporadic visions and realizations of things to come and a solitary meeting with the bear, but not enough to fully indoctrinate him into the traditions. Isaac cannot connect fully with nature because he is not wholly *from* nature. Neither he nor his ancestors are born from nature, he is a McCaslin. This incongruity is at the root of Isaac's inner tension.

The next November, when Isaac is 13 and a year has passed since his initiation, Sam tells Isaac what the bear and the forest has known for some time now: Old Ben's time is nearing its

end. Furthermore, the bear has expressed his wishes for it to end sooner rather than later, something that Isaac with his limited connection to the bear has managed to detect as well. They know that they are getting closer to Old Ben each year and Sam tells Isaac that someone is going to get lucky and kill him some day. Isaac agrees, saying what the great bear cannot say himself: “That’s why it must be one of us. So it wont be until the last day. When even he dont want it to last any longer” (201).

There are several passages that hint at the need for old Ben to die because he no longer has a place in the forest. The first time he is mentioned he is described as being “not malevolent but just big, too big for the dogs which tried to bay it, for the horses which tried to ride it down, for the men and the bullets they fired into it; too big for the very country which was its constricting scope” (183). One can imagine that this was not always the case, but that the bear’s peers have been chased away by the slow and steady deforestation at the hands of speculative landowners interested in profiting off the land. The forest has not grown smaller by itself: from the moment the white Southern industrialist arrived it had been a “doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness” (183). This steady act of deforestation has led Old Ben, the former king of the forest, to be reduced to “an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life” (183). That he is likened to a phantom and a deity also contributes to establishing him as some kind of a guardian of the forest, something that perhaps belongs more in spirit than in physical form. Everything about Old Ben, even his name, suggests he is too old to belong in the forest; man, having gnawed at the wilderness for so long, has finally cornered the great bear. So it is not the cunning skill of the hunters that finally catches the bear, but the steady deforestation that is his doom. His death is further made possible by the aid of his spiritual connections to Sam and Isaac. Although the death of Old Ben is an inevitability, he does not die because the

hunters want to kill him for sport or sustenance, but because the forest (and thereby Old Ben himself) wishes for it to end.

However, the great bear, proud and indomitable as he is, is not going to go down without a fight. To set the stage for his demise, they need one final tool, something to bring the hunting party closer to Old Ben, close enough to allow them to deliver the final blow: “We aint got the dog yet. But maybe some day” (193).

Lion

The death of Old Ben is perhaps the most enigmatic issue of *Go Down, Moses*. His death at the hands of the mongrel dog Lion and Boon brings up many difficult questions: What is it about Lion that enables him to hold Old Ben when none of the other dogs could? Why is it necessary for the bear to die, and why is Boon, the bumbling idiot, the one to do the deed? The dynamics around the bear’s death is determined according to the characters’ roles in relation to nature: An understanding of the characters’ connections or disconnections to nature can help explain their actions at the death of the great bear. Everything around Old Ben’s death is decided long before it happens.

As always, it is Sam who offers the solution to the problem of holding Old Ben long enough for someone to deliver the final blow. The answer comes in the form of a wild mongrel by the name Lion. Sam manages to break Lion down, not enough to make him tame, only tame enough to hold the bear. But Lion is more than just a tool, he becomes the connection between the hunters and the bear, between the civilized world and the wilderness. He is the missing piece between the hunting party and Old Ben, between man and nature: He is the bridge they need in order to reach and hold the great bear. The concept of Lion being half-wild and half-tame, connected both to nature and to man, speaks loudly of how man’s relationship to nature has deteriorated in *Go Down, Moses*. Humans have become so far

removed from legitimately interacting with nature that the only way they can approach it (Big Ben here understood as nature incarnate) is through the aid of this frightening and disloyal half-wild beast.

Old Ben and Lion share certain traits. They are both the boss of their domains. Old Ben is the boss of the bears, Lion is the boss of the dogs. Lion is even directly compared to a bear when the hunting party returns to Sam in the winter and the young dogs meet Lion, whereupon Lion swiftly hits the smallest one “rolling and yelping for five or six feet with a blow of one paw as a bear would have done” (208). Unlike Old Ben, this half-wild fierce dog has no allegiance to anything or anyone. One of the first times Isaac is with Sam and sees the bear in the wild, Sam tells Isaac that they are not sure why Old Ben keeps close, yet out of reach, of the hunting party, but muses that perhaps he does it to warn the smaller bears that the hunting party has arrived. Lion is not really a part of Old Ben's wilderness. When Boon sees Lion for the first time, he asks Sam if it will let him touch him, to which Sam replies “You can touch him. (...) He dont care. He dont care about nothing or nobody” (208). Lion, in simply being an animal, is of the wild, but not from it.

Faulkner also seems to have taken some steps to create a subtle but unique relationship between Isaac and Lion. In many ways, they are opposites, yet still connected. They are both initiated by Sam Fathers: Isaac into the domain of nature and Lion into the domain of man. They each possess one half of the qualities that are required in order to interact genuinely with nature: Humility and endurance. Isaac shows humility, whereas Lion “inferred not only courage (...) but *endurance*” (225; emphasis added). Lion also causes Ike to have a revelation, an uncanny and ineffable realization of things to come. It appears when he is confronted with Lion as Sam has revealed that he is going to train him to hold the bear:

So he should have hated and feared Lion. Yet he did not. It seemed to him that there was a fatality in it. It seemed to him that something, he didn't know what, was beginning; had already begun. It was like the last act on a set stage. It was the beginning of the end of something, he didn't know what except that he would not grieve. He would be humble and proud that he had been found worthy to be a part of it too or even just to see it too. (214)

Isaac's reaction to the beginning of the end is peculiar in many ways, and is one instance where his duality between the domain of nature and man clash. "He should have hated and feared Lion", but instead he is "humble and proud". His raw human side should hate and fear Lion for destroying the wilderness that he was raised in, but his spirit as a hunter according to the old ways and as a part of nature knows that this is the way it must be. He realizes this the moment he sees Sam, Lion and Old Ben together where he experiences yet another epiphany: "only Sam and Old Ben and the mongrel Lion were taintless and incorruptible" (181):

Because they are all so closely connected to nature, they all understand their place and know that this is the way it has to be, therefore none are at fault and they can remain "taintless and incorruptible". He accepts it humbly and proud, which is the same manner in which he accepted his initiation into nature, the day he shot his first deer. Isaac reacts the same way to his initiation to the wild as he does when faced with its end: He remains passive. Because Isaac is so squarely placed between nature and man, he has no other choice but to remain passive. He does not take action, he does not try to stop Lion nor does he save Old Ben, he merely watches as nature takes its course.

The Death of Old Ben

The only characters present at the death of Old Ben are Boon, Lion, Sam and Isaac. Except for Isaac who remains an observer, they all have their role to play in his death. But there can only be one who delivers the final blow. At the onset it seems unlikely that Boon, the bumbling man-child who “had never killed anything larger than a squirrel and that sitting” (167), would be the one to kill the great bear, but it must necessarily be so. It is of great significance that Boon is the one that has to end the life of Old Ben, and the reason lies in Boon’s discordant relationship to nature.

Almost by process of elimination we can determine what each of the five characters’ roles are in Old Ben’s final moments. It cannot be Isaac who ends the life of Old Ben, simply because he at this stage is simply a passive observer to the end of the wildlife. Isaac cannot be the one to kill Old Ben, but it is not because he never had a chance. At one time Isaac was hunting with a small dog and came upon Old Ben. The small dog charges against the bear, and in spite of having a clear shot, he drops his rifle and charges up to rescue the dog from the bear. Old Ben retreats and Sam Fathers rushes up to Isaac and says: “You’ve done seed him twice now, with a gun in your hands, (...) [t]his time you couldn’t have missed him” (200). Isaac returns the question: “Neither could you, (...) [y]ou had the gun. Why didn’t you shoot him?” (201). Sam is equally reluctant to provide an answer, because although he provides the tools necessary, he cannot kill the bear because his role is to be the guide and the two are too closely connected. Lion can and does help Boon kill Old Ben because he is half-wild and half-tame, yet he is not close enough to the domain of man to deliver the final blow. Lion and Boon also share a connection in that “Boon was a mastiff” (163), a large dog loyal to Major de Spain and Isaac’s cousin McCaslin. They also share eyes that are free “of meanness or generosity or gentleness or viciousness” (225). Because Lion is also an animal from the forest, he must necessarily die together with Old Ben to fulfill the symbolic need for all things

“nature”, including Sam Fathers, to die with its guardian since the end of the bear means the end of nature as well. It also has a very fitting symbolic meaning that Lion, the tool they need to bridge the gap between humans and nature, should die along with Old Ben after he finally managed to hold him, his death being the last bridge the short sighted humans burn behind them before they doom the wilderness to the ax men to be chopped down for lumber. Therefore, the only one left who is eligible to deliver the final blow is Boon. But Boon is not the chosen one simply because of happenstance: It must be Boon who kills Old Ben because Boon is “the changed man”; the corrupted man.

Because Old Ben is the guardian of the forest, he has power over the woods and, to a large extent, the beings in it. The ones who are fully human cannot come in contact with Old Ben, which is why they must use Lion and Sam just to get a chance at killing him. When all the pieces are in place, provided by Sam Father, they finally get their first real chance. However, the “civilized” humans cannot kill him. Even Walter Ewell, the character whose most pronounced feature is his prowess as a hunter and his record of never missing a target, shoots twice at the bear and does not kill him. Major de Spain and the others are too human to deliver the finishing blow to Old Ben, but Boon, in the “non-human” quality found in his blood along with Sam Fathers and the features that he shares with Lion, is connected to nature enough for him to be allowed a clumsy, although effective, surge with his blade.

Boon shares some of the same blood as Sam Fathers, but instead of embracing the old traditions he has changed his blood and become almost a white servant to Major de Spain, failing his Native American ancestors and furthering the insult by killing the last embodiment of nature in The Big Bottom: Old Ben himself. Since only he and Sam share Native American blood, Boon is the one with the most potential for connecting with nature apart from Sam, more so than Isaac since he is only a neophyte in training with proxy blood, but Boon only uses his blood for bragging rights. He has squandered his heritage in the worst way possible

according to Faulkner's fictional world: By selling out his connection to nature in order to follow a more modern lifestyle, ultimately ending the life of the spirit of the forest, resulting in him being overcome by grief and going insane at the very end of "The Bear".

The connection between Sam and Old Ben is so powerful that in the same moment that Old Ben dies, Sam has some sort of heart attack and falls over, finally dying from "exhaustion" some time later. Lion has been slashed open by Old Ben in the attack and dies from his wounds soon after Sam Fathers, the mongrel's final act "to look at the woods for a moment before closing his eyes again, to remember the woods, or to see that they were still there" (235). Lion must also die now that the guardian of the forest has perished, his final survey of the forest a warning of what the death of Old Ben will bring. In the end, they return to the earth together, Sam being buried in the forest together with Old Ben's mutilated paw and Lion's remains, "not held fast in earth but free in earth, and not in earth but of earth" (312). Around 60 years would pass before we see Isaac again, now an old man, in the ending to the hunting narrative, "Delta Autumn".

"Delta Autumn"

The landscape has become unrecognizable after over 60 years and the booming industry that time carries with it. At the end of "The Bear", Isaac sees the first traces of the decay of nature following the death of Old Ben. The hunting party now has to pass newly established lumber camps and take a train that goes straight through the forest to reach new and unfamiliar grounds to hunt, the wilderness receding further every year. Isaac has been observing this change over the decades from the sidelines: "He had watched it, not being conquered, destroyed, so much as retreating since its purpose was served now and its time an outmoded time" (326). Major de Spain stopped accompanying them after he agreed to lease the hunting rights to The Big Bottom, and later decided to sell away the property all together. In "Do You

Love Nature if You Fear Her Body?" (2009), Fredrik C. Brøgger comments on this briefly: "Instead of a celebration (sic) the close unity and kinship between man and nature, we have the pantheism of a single Indian who dies in the course of the tale (...) this may serve to explain why it becomes so easy to destroy, indeed why de Spain sells it off. It is easier to let something that you feel unrelated to, become abused" (14). Major de Spain, as the most prosperous of the members, no longer feels a connection to nature after having exacted his revenge on Old Ben and exhausted all value from the forest. Now, the hunting party has to go farther and farther each year in order to find any wildlife to hunt, the ax men slowly and steadily biting at their heels. As the years pass, all the original members except for Isaac stop their yearly reconnaissance with nature. Now an old man near 80, Isaac goes hunting with two young men, the grandchildren of his former hunting partners, but in no way from the same stock of hunters as Isaac. All the values of the old people, the connections man had to nature, have been severed, all but for Isaac's, who continues the hunting trips despite his failing health. His persistence for hunting seems to be more out of nostalgia than wanting to engage in the act of hunting itself, this understanding being conveyed early from the narrative voice comparing the simple and slow past with the fast-paced future: "At first they had come in wagons" but now "they went in cars, driving faster and faster each year because the roads were better and they had farther and farther to drive" (319).

At the very end of the hunting narrative, Isaac is informed that one of the young men in camp has managed to shoot a deer. They will not tell Isaac what kind of deer, but he discovers the truth through being granted a final communication with nature, and whispers it out loud to himself: "It was a doe" (347). He lies back down on his cot, again, passive, and folds his hands. Despite having taught the boys, as Sam Father's had taught him, "not only how to distinguish between the prints left by a buck or a doe but between the sound they made in moving" (320), they clumsily mistake a doe for a deer, or perhaps eager to make one do not

care to distinguish between them at all. This is not dissimilar to the manner in which the ax men clumsily and without consideration destroy the forest. His nephews are not interested in sustaining a connection with nature as Isaac is and ignore his teachings. The shooting of a doe, effectively breaking a cardinal rule among hunters, is just another metaphor in a long line of others that reflect how man's careless and shortsighted treatment of nature has brought about its end. Ultimately, Isaac fails in every aspect. He fails to repudiate his cursed McCaslin heritage, he fails as a husband and father, he fails in raising new future hunters and he fails at any hope of restoring nature back to its former vitality. The only thing he can manage to do in the end is to keep continuing the tradition of the yearly November hunt with nothing but a skeletal crew of uninterested young men and his own memories of how things used to be. Isaac's connection to Sam and Old Ben has left him exactly where these old giants were before they passed away, "an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time (...) and alone; widowed childless and absolved of mortality" (183). His initiation into and connection with nature is what has enabled Isaac to live a long life, like Sam and Old Ben, but the McCaslin curse that he also possesses renders him torn between two worlds, and passive, allowing no hope for nature to endure.

Isaac's passivity does not only concern nature, but extends to issues regarding race and family as well. Charles S. Aiken brings this up in "A Geographical Approach to William Faulkner's 'The Bear'". He examines a situation where a mulatto girl approaches Isaac. She has had a child by Roth Edmonds, the grandchild of Isaac's older cousin, McCaslin Edmonds, and seeks Isaac's help, but he dismisses her: "He demonstrates the same attitude that he has to the land, essentially being unwilling to do anything". Instead, he gives her a hunting horn that Isaac received from Major de Spain, a horn that "is a valuable possession, but it has lost its meaning as the wilderness of the delta vanished in the wake of the sharecropper-cotton plantation"

(458). The meaning behind his once precious hunting horn being given away so easily is interesting as it marks how far the value of hunting has deteriorated for Isaac. I would however argue that Isaac not offering any real aid to the mulatto girl is not so much him being unwilling as unable. Because of his dualities, the only viable choice he has left is to remain passive, not only to nature but to all things. This is ultimately a product of his environment and upbringing as delineated in this chapter, being raised with opposite and incongruent values: Civilized life and nature.

There is another thing concerning the mulatto woman that further reveals Isaac's character. When riding in the car along with the grandsons of his former hunting partners, they begin talking about World War II and fighting in the war. Isaac makes the comment that: "the only fighting anywhere that ever had anything of God's blessing on it has been when men fought to protect does and fawns" (323). Does and fawns can here mean two things: Either actual does and fawns, young deer and female deer, or women and children. It is quite possible that Isaac intends for it to mean both, meaning one should fight for both women and children and to protect the forest. Prior to this, there is a conversation where one of the boys claims Roth Edmonds is only going on the hunting trip to meet with a doe, inferring that he is going to meet a woman. Towards the end of the story, the mulatto woman who has a child by Roth Edmonds, seeks Isaac's help. Isaac is essentially given a final opportunity at the very end of the story to help erase his background, to fight against his slave-holding forefathers and helping this mulatto woman, an opportunity to fight for both a doe and fawn.

Unfortunately, Isaac has never fought to protect neither does nor fawns, and he simply gives away his hunting horn instead of offering any real help. This encounter with the mulatto woman making clear for the reader that even after all the years that have passed between the death of Old Ben and Isaac becoming old and whittled, his character remains unchanged: He continues as a passive observer of the fall of values and the wilderness.

Ecocriticism

According to Hans Bertens in *Literary Theory: The Basics* (2008), a basic definition of ecocriticism is an approach that:

examines representations of nature in literary—but also non-literary—texts, in films, in television series, and so on. It pays particular attention to the question of how nature is constructed in those presentations. The animal world may be presented as apparently benign, loyal and even courageous (...) or as dangerous, unpredictable, and definitely non-human. (200)

Under this definition, the hunting narrative of *Go Down, Moses* is especially ripe with potential for insight into how man's treatment of nature is present in the way he interacts with it. This is perhaps most evident in the way the white industrialists manipulate wilderness in order to continue to expand, based simply on their right to use the land they own as they will. In being southerners, the hunting party from Jefferson are by right and tradition entitled to hunt game in the South so long as they treat the earth with the dignity and humility it deserves, or in Faulkner's own terms: "provided he in his turn were humble and enduring enough" (182). However, they are also from a tradition of slave holders and men who stole, bought and sold the land, another case where the duality in man restricts their capability to wholly interact with nature. In the end, these original sins have made it an impossibility to connect meaningfully and genuinely with nature, falling back on a set of rules to maintain during their unlawful hunt. Because they are not connected with nature in any real and legitimate way, they cannot hunt on equal ground with the great bear, and their yearly chase for him can be seen as exploitative of nature, and as a strong symbol for yet another action of

intervention, intrusion and ultimately exploitation of nature based on the right of man to consume and expand. A closer look on how this distance to nature affects the hunters will be offered in the following chapter.

In *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001), Lawrence Buell acknowledges that “for Faulkner, environmental exploitation was one among a range of interlinked forms of regional pathology, among which (to name only one other) racism would certainly have seemed more important” (188). He correctly reasons that *Go Down, Moses* “began and ended more as a race book than as an environment book”, but importantly notes that “neither race nor any other social issue should be held up as *the* master referent of this or any other Faulkner text in terms of which its environmental representation must be decoded” (189). Lawrence Buell is a well-known figure within ecocriticism, a branch of literary studies that looks at how environmental concerns and the overall subject of nature are treated in literature. In *Writing for an Endangered World*, Buell does not consider Faulkner a nature writer or ecocritic so much as a person who simply wrote about nature. He seems more comfortable to label him a historian of the South in the way he focuses a lot on its history: The Civil War, the loss of glory in its wake and the burden and guilt of the past. His impression of Faulkner as an environmental writer is divided; on the one hand he does write extensively about nature in his works, often giving the impression of being “disconcerted by what he took to be ruthless exploitation of rurality by industry and agribusiness”, while on the other hand Faulkner “never developed a coherent environmental ethic, despite his perspicacity as an observer of forest and fauna” (171, 176). Buell has an interesting discussion of Faulkner as he does not simply look at the stories in *Go Down, Moses* as such, but also critically looks at the stories from Faulkner’s position as a writer. He argues that “he was no more than marginally interested in programs of wildlife management or environmental education as such. His environmentalist interest, such

as it was, certainly as a writer and probably also as person, was in conceiving hunting ‘in whatever sense’ and ecological endangerment at the level of the individual encounter” (193). He sees this most evidently in what he takes to be a reversal of the normal route to nature extinction in “The Bear”:

In a proper narrative of ecological degradation, habitat destruction produces the death of the game, first the big predators and then the rest. Yet Faulkner might reply to this that not only does his novella's way of imagining the situation make symbolic sense, it is also true in its own way to how environmental history works. It makes better historical (cultural) sense to define the integrity of the bottomland in terms of the critters with the greatest charisma, and to see the land as losing value when they disappear.

(194)

As such, that Faulkner marks the end of the wilderness from the death of Old Ben makes him appear more motivated as a writer than an environmentalist true to how nature degradation really occurs. He gives three reasons for not viewing Faulkner as an environmentalist: That Faulkner's knowledge of environmental cause and effect was spotty, that the notion of “natural force” as human adversary ran strong in his thinking and that he was a professional writer with one eye pragmatically on the marketplace, prone to writing stories that would appeal to audiences within man-versus-natural-disaster stories and wilderness initiation stories, both of which we find in abundance in *Go Down, Moses* (176). The third argument, that Faulkner wrote “The Bear” because he knew hunting and wilderness initiation stories would sell, is especially interesting. Considering that Faulkner was one of the largest landowners in his hometown of Oxford at the time, it seems too much of a coincidence that

Buell would read from Major de Spain that “the problem of ownership of the Big Bottom land is not that it is privately held but that Major de Spain allows it to be harvested” (192). It makes sense, then, that Faulkner is seen more as a writer “with one eye pragmatically on the marketplace” since he relied heavily on his stories selling on the market to afford his large amount of land. Faulkner himself admitted when speaking to a class at the University of Mississippi that some things he wrote simply for money, *Sanctuary* being one such book.

It seems, however, that he was a little too quick to dismiss the potential for *Go Down, Moses* to voice ecocritical concerns. Buell seems to have been more focused on Faulkner’s overall abilities as a nature writer and his quality as an environmentalist more so than the content that is present in the stories. To be fair, Buell wrote this relatively early in his career and later, having expanded his definition on what constitutes ecocritical and environmental writing, said that there was much more to be drawn from the book in terms of its environmental focus.

The hunting narrative, while indeed focusing much on race and Isaac’s repudiation of racial guilt, is also greatly concerned with humans’ impact on and relation with nature. One parallel that includes both is the case of Sam Fathers.

Sam Fathers is half-Native American of the Chickasaw tribe and part-black. His father was a Chickasaw chief who impregnated a quadroon (one-fourth black) woman and who then arranged for her to marry a black slave while still pregnant with Sam and sold them all to the McCaslins, long before Isaac was born. This is where Sam got his last name, which in Chickasaw meant Sam Has-Two-Fathers, being translated to Sam Fathers in English. Unlike his father who very much assimilated into the white lifestyle, Sam maintained his Native American traditions. His split heritage causes a split in him that is similar to Isaac’s: Because of his black blood, he is a slave to the McCaslins, but because he is descendent of Native

American royalty, he is treated with much more respect than the other slaves or people with Native American blood, like Boon, never being forced to do any particular kind of work. In this manner, Sam functions as a parallel to the way the white Southern industrialist treats nature; although they show reverence for him, they are unwilling to set him free. This is expressed in how Major de Spain reacts to the death of Old Ben. While he shows an appreciation for nature as a hunter and a woodsman, he ultimately sells away the land rights some time after Old Ben's death instead of just letting the earth rest: the earth is something he greatly enjoys and appreciates, yet he cannot let it "go free". This is also an expression of the dueling attitudes towards nature that permeates *Go Down, Moses*.

Indeed, even the very way "The Bear" is structured speaks of the way racial oppression, land ownership and nature are connected in *Go Down, Moses*. "The Bear" is divided into five chapters, chapters one through three and five are part of the hunting narrative, whereas the long chapter four is a leap into the future where Isaac McCaslin struggles with his guilt of slave- and land ownership. It might come across as a strange and, indeed, abrupt transition from the third to the fourth chapter in terms of theme, but there is a great amount of order in it: Both slavery and land ownership and nature are joined together by one thing: they are victims of the careless and brutal opposition by southern white industrialists. Matthew Wynn Sivils draws up this comparison quite succinctly in his article "Faulkner's Ecological Disturbances" (2006). His claim is that Faulkner's usage of "ecological disturbances", meaning floods, fires, deforestation and so on, are tools he uses to say something larger about man's relation to the environment, and that "For Faulkner, race, poverty, class and other social factors *are* environmental issues" (489). In the case of slavery and land ownership he states that Faulkner "portrays the land of The South as symbiotically linked with the plight of African Americans, since after all both suffer from a form of parasitism on the part of whites (...) they are joined by oppression" (490, 492). It is an

interesting connection to explore and is indeed illustrated in the case of Sam Fathers above. However, Sivils appears to take the comparison too far when he says that “Ultimately Faulkner portrays an enslaved and exploited land that, like a vengeful slave, revolts against its oppressors” (490). He talks about race, here being African Americans (and excluding Native Americans), in the same terms as land, but it comes across as a forced comparison and seems a little disconcerting. Although his attempt to anthropomorphize nature and, thereby, increasing its sentimental value is an interesting idea, the opposite side of this reasoning, then, becomes equally true and upsetting: the dehumanizing effect is has on the quality of the slaves by reducing them to an act of symbolism acting in synergy with the trees to create an awkward line of defense on the behalf of environmentalists. The attempt has something to it, but its execution fails on what I would consider an important premise: Reducing humans to trees and rocks reduces their humanity as well, which is something that should be avoided for any argument one wishes to make.

CHAPTER THREE: “THE ANCIENT AND UNREMITTING CONTEST”

Introduction

In the previous chapter we looked at what *Go Down, Moses* has to offer when we place nature in the center and examine the connections between it and the characters. For this purpose the hunting narrative of *Go Down, Moses* has been the most explored part of the novel, but the hunting aspect itself has remained primarily untouched. Although hunting and nature are closely tied together in the hunting narrative to the point that separating them becomes a task of its own, I have attempted to keep them apart as looking specifically at the different approaches to the way hunting is performed is worth devoting a chapter to. As such, this chapter will be focusing more on the hunting aspect of the novel: How hunting is performed, what the different acts of hunting can mean or do and what the overall function of hunting is. A central aspect to this discussion is whether the characters are right in hunting for Old Ben, and to what extent their hunting is exploitative of nature. One interesting aspect to explore is the values of the hunters, and how the way the characters act during the hunt is an additional reflection of their connection to nature. I will also be looking at how other critics have examined the usage of hunting in *Go Down, Moses*. Looking specifically at how hunting works in *Go Down, Moses* furthers the point and deepens our understanding of how only those who are genuinely in touch with nature can genuinely interact with it.

The hunt for Old Ben in “The Bear” is perhaps the most memorable and important undertaking of *Go Down, Moses*. The inhabitants around the forest have engaged the old bear for so long that he has become a legend among the hunters in The Big Bottom. Around him are generated stories of “corn-cribs broken down (...) traps and deadfalls overthrown and dogs mangled and slain and shotgun and even rifle shots delivered at point-blank range yet with no more effect than so many peas blown through a tube by a child“ (183).

There are many mysteries surrounding the hunt for and death of the great bear. One big question that comes to mind is simple, yet provides several interesting answers: Why do they hunt for Old Ben? Is it merely an act of self-defense or self-preservation for their livestock and property? What is the overall function of hunting in *Go Down, Moses*? These are some of the questions that this chapter is devoted to.

With the understanding of nature and the connections between the characters and the forest provided in the previous chapter, it was touched upon that it seems possible to identify two starkly different and simultaneous agendas for hunting Old Ben: One group of hunters are based on human interests, the other on nature. This discussion bears further exploration as it illuminates another way in which the characters' actions show a connection or disconnection to nature. To further identify the function of hunting, it is beneficial to take it to the level of the individual characters. They all have their reasons and attitudes towards hunting, some more in accordance with nature than others. These groups will be referred to as *the human hunters* and *the natural hunters*, respectively. They are distinguished by their motivation for hunting Old Ben as well as by their general attitude towards hunting.

The Human Hunters

The main characters that make up the first group of hunters consists of Major de Spain, General Compson, McCaslin Edmonds and Walter Ewell (Uncle Ash and Tennie's Jim not being of significance for this discussion). These make up the members that stem from the domain of man. Boon is almost wholly a part of this group as well, but because of the sliver of Native American blood in his veins he is also loosely within the domain of nature. These men draw their reason for hunting from their culture: simply because they are of the South, they are obliged and entitled to hunt game in the forest according to tradition, to take part in "the ancient and unremitting contest according to the ancient and immitigable rules which voided

all regrets and brooked no quarter;— the best game of all” (182). However, any man can enter the woods, but the hunters in particular need to form a pact with nature if they are to be continued access to the deer, possum, turkey and bear that lie within. He may “earn for himself from the wilderness the name and state of hunter provided he in his turn were humble and enduring enough” (182). These qualities that Faulkner lay out are the necessary prerequisites for a sustainable relationship with nature: being humble by showing respect for nature and not wishing to conquer or subdue it, and enduring by not taking more from nature than one needs. In Faulkner’s universe, these rules are not simply a set of superstitious values handed down through generations of hunters, but ironclad, and as inescapable as the laws of physics. But do these hunters possess the humility and endurance required to interact genuinely with nature? Somewhere along the way the hunters start to break away from the ancient pact with nature, culminating in the final killing of the guardian spirit of the forest. It seems like Faulkner shows the reader how coexisting peacefully with nature was an impossibility from the beginning because of humans’ inherent need to expand combined with a fear of wanting. Are the hunters justified, then, in hunting for Old Ben?

There is one threshold that is important to attempt to identify, the moment where hunting goes from being a symbiotic activity in accordance with nature to becoming exploitative. There are many possible answers to when this break occurs since we are merely dropped into this universe created by Faulkner without much insight as to what has taken place before these stories, but it seems to have been a long process that is just on the brink of teetering over as Isaac McCaslin is introduced. The break seems to have occurred when the humans are no longer “humble and enduring enough”, when man, in his pride and vanity, chops down the trees to expand their fields and hunt not with bows and spears but with rifles. It is the guns and the technology, the speed and impatience, that disconnects humans from nature. John

Lydenberg, in “Nature Myth in Faulkner’s ‘The Bear’”, takes this separation between man and nature to begin from when the white Southerner started taking slaves to do his work and speculated in land ownership: “[T]hey are part of that South that has bought and sold land and has held men as slaves. Their original sins have alienated them irrevocably from nature” (64). To the issue of land ownership, there seems to be little in the stories that suggests land ownership as something negative, especially considering Faulkner himself being a large landowner. As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, Lawrence Buell noted in *Writing for an Endangered World* that “the problem of ownership of the Big Bottom land is not that it is privately held but that Major de Spain allows it to be harvested” (192). The issues of slave ownership being at the root of man’s disconnectedness to nature is an interesting approach, and surely a part of the larger problem that man’s values are no longer compatible with nature. They are so incompatible, that what previously would have been a normal hunt for a bear, Lydenberg sees as a rape: “Thus their conquest of Old Ben becomes a rape. What might in other circumstances have been right, is now a violation of the wilderness and the Southern land” (64). Although I believe it more sensational than anything to call it a rape, there is certainly a sense of exploitation around the hunting and killing of the great bear.

From the very start, it was never the goal to kill Old Ben. For a long time the yearly hunting expeditions in the cold month of November was a necessary tradition, allowing the hunters the chance to prove themselves in the wild as well as providing meat for their families. The final day dedicated to the hunt for the great bear himself was more a test of the hunters’ skills than a hope to kill it, a way to prove themselves against the bear who mangled their dogs and defied their traps. “To [Isaac], they were going not to hunt bear and deer but to keep yearly rendezvous with the bear which they did not even intend to kill”, to participate in “the yearly pageant-rite of the old bear’s furious immortality” (184). Until towards the end of “The Bear”, Old Ben seems invulnerable, indeed. However, The old bear’s immortality may

not be superstition so much as a necessary device for Faulkner's natural universe: Because Old Ben is the guardian spirit of the forest, he is nearly invulnerable so long as he does not venture outside of his domain. "[T]hey had departed for the camp each November with no actual intention of slaying it, not because it could not be slain but because so far they had no actual hope of being able to" (190). With this understanding, we realize that the only way the hunters can manage to inflict any real damage on him is to somehow draw him outside the domain of nature. This was explained in the previous chapter through recruiting Sam Fathers and Lion who, with their connection to nature, were able to bridge the gap between humans and nature long enough for them to deal an ending blow to the great bear. The question remains, then, when and why the hunting party's attitude changed from a ritual hunt of the bear, to wanting to end its life.

The decision to seriously hunt for Old Ben comes from the leader of the hunting party, Major de Spain. As the leader, he is the one who decides the direction of the hunting party. It seems that throughout the stories, Major de Spain's and General Compson's attitudes towards hunting is more as a game or sport than a necessary means to provide for their families. This is apparent in how Boon, the negroes and Isaac would spend their time fishing and shooting squirrels while the General and Major de Spain "scorned such other than shooting the wild gobblers with pistols for wagers or to test their marksmanship" (194). As these two are the most well-to-do members of the group, it stands to reason that their primary motivation for hunting is more sport than sustenance. In the beginning it had been more of a game or test of skill, but the killing of Major de Spain's colt changes things. Although Sam fathers has tried to keep Major de Spain in the dark about Old Ben getting closer and closer to the camp by blaming the dead livestock on panthers, he finally blames the death of his colt on Old Ben:

But no panther would have jumped that colt with the dam right there with it. It was Old Ben,” Major de Spain said. “I’m disappointed in him. He has broken the rules. I didn’t think he would have done that (...) now he has come into my house and destroyed my property, out of season too. He broke the rules. It was Old Ben, Sam. (202)

The Major’s reaction to this realization is typically human: He vows revenge on the bear. In terms of connectedness to nature, Old Ben and Major de Spain are on opposite ends of the spectrum and, according to the ancient rules and what they represent, mortal enemies. As Old Ben is nature incarnate, Major de Spain is the embodiment of the human qualities that renders man incompatible with nature: He is short-sighted, impatient and vengeful, culminating in him leading the death of Old Ben and selling away the hunting camp to lumber companies. The attitude that Major de Spain, the spirit of Southern agribusiness, shows towards Old Ben killing his colt is fitting of his symbolic makeup.

He uses cold human logic based on human rules to identify Old Ben as the perpetrator, arguing that “no panther would have jumped that colt with the dam right there with it”. He expresses disappointment in him, in the same manner that an adult might be upset with a child when it breaks the house rules. Major de Spain paints himself in an elevated position to nature, embodying the conquering spirit of the Southern white industrialist, going so far as to patronize the bear in his belief that the forest belongs to the men and hunters. Neither does he show any remorse or sadness about the colt being killed, it is not a living thing so much as “property” that has been destroyed, illustrating a view of the world gauged more in terms of property value than sentimental value, or value from simply being living beings. Major de Spain’s main gripe, however, is that “He broke the rules”, and not only that, “out of season too”. But what rules have Old Ben broken? Just as Major de Spain and Old Ben are opposites

in regards to nature, they also seem to adhere to their own set of rules: Old Ben to the ancient rules between hunter and nature, and the Major to the new rules he brings with him from the budding industrialized human world. The only rules that Old Ben has broken are the human rules that, in the first place, do not have any place in the forest. David H. Evans echoes these sentiments in “Taking the Place of Nature: ‘The Bear’ and the Incarnation of America” (1999): “the only rules at issue here are those the hunters have brought with them” (107).

Seen from the perspective of Old Ben, it does not seem like the attack on the colt was by choice. It is the duty of Old Ben, as the guardian of the forest, to make sure that the rules of nature are upheld. So long as they are upheld, the hunters can continue harvesting peacefully from nature. For a long time now, the old bear has been taunted by “the little puny humans [who] swarmed and hacked (...) in a fury of abhorrence and fear like pygmies about the ankles of a drowsing elephant” (183). Because the humans have steadily been losing their ability to be humble and enduring, pushing the forest further and further as they continue to expand, the guardian is forced to retaliate, attacking their livestock and destroying their machinations.

In a final effort to push back against these intruding forces, he kills one of Major de Spain’s colts in an act of desperation. The killing of the colt being “out of season” has no meaning as this is purely a human construct. Because of this, the humans, using their cold logic and being incensed by thoughts of vengeance, retaliate brutally.

This leads to a continuing of the discussion from the previous chapter: The reason the human hunters cannot kill Old Ben is not simply their disconnected state to nature, but also the way in which they hunt: They are hunting according to human rules instead of the ancient rules according to nature, thus, they hunt on the wrong premise to begin with and never had a chance to kill the great bear. However, the damaging of Old Ben one night and challenging his legend as invulnerable is the catalyst needed for them to engage the final pursuit.

Challenging Old Ben's Invulnerability

There is one instance where the hunting party seems to have damaged Old Ben's legend of being invulnerable. It is the otherwise inconspicuous General Compson who accomplishes this feat. The next November after Major de Spain has declared that they will enact vengeance on the bear for killing his colt, the dogs manage to pick up the bear's scent. Lion chases Old Ben and holds him long enough for two of the dogs, General Compson on horse and Boon on the mule to overtake him. The whole scene is told from the perspective of Isaac, who is catching up to them, and so we only have his lacking impression of what took place. It does, however, bring up some interesting insight into General Compson:

The boy heard them; he was that near. He heard Boon whooping; he heard the two shots when General Compson delivered both barrels, one containing five buckshot, the other a single ball, into the bear from as close as he could force his almost unmanageable horse (...) he reached the place where General Compson had fired and where Old Ben had killed two of the hounds. He saw the blood from General Compson's shots, but he could go no further. (212-13)

Old Ben eventually manages to escape and they all return to camp where Isaac (and thus the reader) is told what happened after Isaac stopped. Boon was on the one-eyed mule, the only creature that was not scared of the smell of blood and thus could get close to Old Ben. Boon fired five times but hit nothing, jumping off his horse to hold back Lion from chasing Old Ben before finally wrestling Lion back to the camp. Defeated from having been up close and missing five times, Boon feels unworthy to be in the presence of the hunting party, and in

particular Lion, but Major de Spain does not care. He and the rest of the men are elated with the belief that, for the first time, they may actually be able to kill the bear: “Never mind, (...) [i]t was a damned fine race. And we drew blood. Next year we’ll let General Compson or Walter ride Katie, and we’ll get him” (214).

These reports raise several flags concerning General Compson. First, the reader cannot be certain what took place at the time that General Compson drew blood from Old Ben since we are left only with sparse details recounted through the eyes of a panicked young Isaac. However, it is peculiar that in the spot where Isaac finally stops to catch his breath, where the exchange between General Compson, Old Ben and the dogs took place, Isaac would find two dead dogs after General Compson fired exactly two shots. The number of shots corresponding with the dead dogs, in addition to him riding an “almost unmanageable horse” making it difficult to place an accurate shot, renders it believable that it was not Old Ben who killed the two dogs, but General Compson. There is, after all, no way of knowing whether the blood on the ground among the two dead dogs belongs to Old Ben or the dogs since Isaac stopped there and did not continue to pursue the bear, leaving any trail of blood the bear might have left behind unexplored. Faulkner’s clever wording also makes this possible because what Isaac saw was “the blood from General Compson’s shots”, which, since it does not specifically suggest the blood of Old Ben, could just as well belong to the dogs. Faulkner seems to encourage this idea further when, following the moment where they supposedly drew blood, Lion and Boon find Old Ben in the dark: “And this time Lion found the broken trail, the blood perhaps, in the darkness” (213). By subtly adding the word “perhaps”, suggesting doubt, it may very well be that they did not draw blood on that day, and that, despite Major de Spain’s vigorous hope, Old Ben’s immortal status was still intact.

Of course, General Compson is fully aware of this sham, and possibly Boon as well since he was present when the exchange took place, which is why he remains silent when

Major de Spain praises the General for having been the first to draw blood. It can only be speculated on why Boon remains silent, but considering General Compson's not quite honest nature and elevated position within the group, it is not outside the realm of possibilities to imagine fear, or even force, being involved. When the next November has come upon them and the hunting party assembles to go after Old Ben for what will be the last time, Major de Spain wants to assign the one-eyed mule to General Compson: "He drew blood last year; if he'd had a mule then that would have stood, he would have—" but the General quickly interjects: "No, (...) I'm too old to go helling through the woods on a mule or a horse or anything else anymore. Besides, I had my chance last year and missed it. I'm going on a stand this morning. I'm going to let that boy ride Katie" (224). His reason is flimsy and unpracticed: It seems doubtful that he feels too old to chase the bear when he did just that the previous year. With the theory that General Compson did not manage to injure Old Ben the year before, instead, clumsily and without consideration, missing and shooting two dogs, it becomes clear why General Compson is quick to decline the offer of riding the fearless mule. Instead, so as to be sure his reputation as the only man to have been able to injure the bear remains intact, he suggest the member of the group least likely to kill the bear ride the mule: Isaac. Isaac, the youngest member of the hunting party who, when he had the opportunity to shoot Old Ben two years earlier, dropped his rifle in order to rescue one of the small pups from Old Ben. Indeed, he seems like the person least likely to be able to injure Old Ben, and the General would be correct, but not for the reasons that he believes, or is ever able to comprehend considering his disconnectedness with nature.

The actions of General Compson the day he supposedly drew blood from Old Ben also make clear his position in relation to nature. When he had the opportunity to fire at the bear, he seized it, ignoring the dogs surrounding it and the poor accuracy due to his unmanageable

horse. He charges in for the kill, without endurance, without being patient and waiting for a sure shot, and despite having killed two dogs instead, in his complete vanity, continues the pretense of having injured the invulnerable bear. According to the pact between hunters and nature, the hunter must show endurance and humility. Instead, the General shows impatience and vanity. It becomes obvious, then, that General Compson could never have injured Old Ben, let alone kill him, simply by virtue of “the ancient and immitigable rules” (182).

This scene also contributes to show the dynamics between the characters and nature, and how the way they hunt reflects their connection to nature. In the situation with General Compson where he has an opportunity to hurt the bear, he charges into the situation and kills two dogs in the process, the bear left unscathed. The year before, Isaac happened upon the bear with a dog as well. His reaction when his dog charges at the bear is the opposite of the General’s: Instead of rushing to take a shot and killing a dog, he throws his rifle to the ground and rushes in to save the dog. The completely opposite reaction to the similar situation shows that they are polar opposites in their approach to hunting and to interacting with nature. There is a final scene where this situation occurs as well, on the day that Old Ben dies. This time, it is Lion who charges at the bear, and, in the process of overtaking him, Boon has a chance to shoot it and doesn’t, claiming that: “Lion was too close to him! That little hound too! Lion was so close I couldn’t shoot!” (227). However, this may not be so much his wish to protect Lion as him being infamous for his inaccuracy with a rifle, having the previous year been “in twenty-five feet of him and (...) missed him five times”. Unlike the General, he does not rush the shot and draws his rifle back, honest about his failure as a marksman. Still, upon seeing Lion lunging at the bear’s throat and wanting to rescue it from harm, he rushes in with his rifle dropped, but unlike Isaac, brandishes a knife and attacks the bear with it, resulting in the bear’s and lion’s death. This shows how Boon’s place, in terms of his connection to nature and virtue as a hunter, is between General Compson and Isaac, between civilization and

nature. He does not show vanity like the general, but neither does he show patience. This shows how the way the members hunt reflect their relation to nature, and further strengthens the point that only the ones who share a connection to nature are able to injure the bear, rendering it an impossibility from the start that the disconnected General Compson could have harmed Old Ben.

The end of Old Ben's life at the hands of Boon has already been examined in the previous chapter. It was explained in terms of connections, how the ones who are closest to nature (Isaac and Sam Fathers) can not kill him because of that closeness, and how the ones furthest from nature (Major de Spain, Walter Ewell, General Compson and McCaslin Edmonds) can not kill him for a lack of closeness, leaving only the ones in the middle of that spectrum, Boon and Lion. There is, however, another possibility as to why Boon was able to kill Old Ben. Lydenberg makes brief mention of this in a footnote when he examines why Boon did not fire at Old Ben when Lion was close: "Boon explained that he could not fire because Lion was too close. That was, of course, not the "real" reason; Boon could not kill Ben with a civilized gun (to say nothing of the fact that he couldn't hit anything with his gun anyway)" (68). This brings up the possibility that, indeed, perhaps Old Ben from the start could not be hurt by a civilized rifle. Faulkner had previously delineated for us that rifles and Old Ben are incompatible in the scene where Isaac ventures to meet with the bear alone in the woods: "He had left the gun; by his own will and relinquishment he had accepted not a gambit, not a choice, but a condition in which not only the bear's heretofore inviolable anonymity but all the ancient rules and balances of hunter and hunted had been abrogated" (196). From this we glean that it is indeed possible to revoke the ancient rules between hunter and hunted and allow a person who does not show humility and endurance to approach Old Ben. The condition for this is that he must put away his rifle, which Boon does prior to facing the bear. Furthermore, upon seeing Lion injured by the bear, Boon becomes furious and

charges at the bear. His Native American blood surging to the surface for an instance, he uses the tools that the “old people” used for hunting in past traditions, by spear and knife, connecting Boon to the old people and the old ways long enough to be able to land a fatal blow to Old Ben. It seems that although the rules of nature may be “ancient and immitigable”, there are always loopholes.

Nature Myth

In his article, “Nature Myth in Faulkner’s ‘The Bear’”, John Lydenberg has an interesting read on the hunt for Old Ben as a mythical scene, believing that it is “the mythical quality of the bear hunt proper that gives the story its haunting power” (65). He sees the annual hunt as the combination of religion and magic in “a ritual demonstration of the eternal struggle between Man and Nature” (65). He has a theory that the hunters engage in the hunt for Old Ben in order to regain their lost purity: “In their rapport with nature and their contest with Old Ben, they regain the purity they have lost in their workaday world, and abjure the petty conventions with which they ordinarily mar their lives” (64). To him, Old Ben is symbol that shows man’s relation to life and thus to nature. The bear is “the tribal god, whom they dare not, and cannot, touch, but whom they are impelled to challenge” (65). Sam Fathers is seen as the high priest, whereas Isaac is the young and pure neophyte indoctrinated into the mysteries of nature. The hunting party must “strive to conquer the Nature God whose very presence challenges them and raises doubts as to their power” (67). Sam Fathers, as the high priest, is tasked with finding the medicine that will allow them to kill the Nature God, and he brings them Lion, the dog which is “removed from the order of nature, but not allowed to partake of the order of civilization or humanity” (67). As to the act of killing the bear itself, Lydenberg assesses that it cannot be Isaac or Sam as they are just there to prepare the ritual, and neither can it be Major de Spain or General Compson as they cannot pair up with Lion. Thus, it must

be Boon, “who has never hit any animal bigger than a squirrel with his shotgun, who is like Lion in his imperturbable nonhumanity” (67). Lydenberg asserts that “Old Ben can be downed only when his time has come, not by the contrived machinations of men, but by the destined ordering of events and his own free will”(68). After the deed is done, Lydenberg sums it up by saying: “They have succeeded in doing what they felt they had to do, what they thought they wanted to do. But their act was essentially sacrilegious, however necessary and glorious it may have seemed (...) They tried to possess what they could not possess, and now they can no longer even share in it” (69). He sees the end of Isaac being “the new priest who will keep himself pure to observe, always from the outside, the impious destruction of the remaining Nature by men who can no longer be taught the saving virtues of pride and humility” (69).

Lydenberg’s reading of the hunt for Old Ben as a ritualistic nature myth is indeed interesting, but, and by his own admission, it “is not exactly Faulkner’s ‘The Bear’” (70). As an alternative reading, it provides many possible answers and has a very interesting and unique take on the hunting narrative. What Lydenberg does well in his exploration of “The Bear” as a nature myth is to identify which of the characters are closer to nature, and thus close to Old Ben, and how this understanding of proximity to nature can enhance a reading of “The Bear”. In particular, his argument that Lion and Boon are the ones to kill Old Ben because of their discordant relationship with nature is very much similar to what I stated in the previous chapter. There are, however, a few issues regarding his reading.

The most prominent contradiction is his view of Sam Fathers and his role in the narrative. Lydenberg stated that he believes man’s inability to interact genuinely stems from, among other things, slave ownership, but then in his nature myth goes on to say that they need Sam Fathers, “the high priest”, in order to interact with Old Ben, the “Nature God”. The contradiction here is that Sam Fathers is a slave to the McCaslins, his more autonomous

position granted through his noble Native American blood notwithstanding. If slave ownership is indeed an obstacle that hinders man from being able to interact with nature, how does he reconcile the fact that the very person the civilized men use in order to reach Old Ben is a slave? Furthermore, there does not seem to be any indication that Old Ben “raises doubts as to their power” or that they hunt him in order to regain some lost sense of purity. In fact, the tradition of hunting him at the end of November seems to be more a game or sport than anything, this point underlined when Major de Spain assures Boon that “[i]t was a damned fine race” (214). Also, it is unclear why Lydenberg brings up the fact that Boon had never killed anything larger than a squirrel. The way it is phrased suggests that this is a positive feature, perhaps making him more “pure” in a way for not having killed any larger animals and thus more worthy in hunting for Old Ben. If that is the case, it does not really make sense as Boon not killing anything larger than a squirrel is not a testament to his purity of mind, but rather his lack of marksmanship. Continuing the previous discussion on General Compson, Lydenberg reasons that: “[Isaac] is not tainted like de Spain or Compson by having owned slaves. According to Faulkner’s version of the huntsman’s code, Ike should be the one who has the right to kill Old Ben, as General Compson feels when he assigns him the mule that can approach the bear” (70). Lydenberg suggests that one would normally assume the purest of the members, in this case Isaac or Sam, to be the one to kill the bear, but that Faulkner chooses Boon and Lion for the deed because it further underlines the point that man has become irrevocably distanced from nature. This is certainly true, for the death of Old Ben would be much less impactful if the “purest” characters would have delivered a swift and worthy end to the bear, instead it is done clumsily by an oaf and a beast. However, it was an impossibility from the start to suggest that Isaac could ever kill Old Ben. When Isaac first meets Old Ben, he was “holding the useless gun which he knew now he would never fire at it, now or ever” (192). Also, Lydenberg’s mythical reading of the final hunt for Old Ben

suggests that “Ike, the young priest, is given the post of honor on the one-eyed mule which alone among the mules and horses will not shy at the smell of blood” (68). His account of the final hunt for Old Ben according to a magical tale between humans and nature is indeed interesting, but, when examined from the narrative of the story itself, its application seems more fanciful. Instead, I argue that Isaac is placed on the one-eyed mule to keep General Compson’s vanity intact. Vanity, the same sin that caused man to be disconnected from nature, is embodied in General Compson, simultaneously being the cause of their disconnectedness to nature and encouraging Major de Spain to rally the final blow to the bear.

The Natural Hunters

“The natural hunters” designate only a small group within the hunting party, namely Sam Fathers and Isaac McCaslin. Because of their distance from the rest of the group, being the only ones initiated into the mysteries of nature, their motives for hunting vary from the rest. We know that in the interim between the day he shot his first deer at twelve years old his hunting expedition as an old man in “Delta Autumn”, Isaac has shot many deer. Although Sam Fathers is the hunting expert, we do not know if he actually participates in the hunting or if he only offers advice and guidance to the hunters. Although we cannot say whether or not Sam enjoys hunting since it is not a matter of wanting to or not as he is a slave to the McCaslins, we do know that Isaac has wanted to be a hunter from when he was very young. He has wanted to become part of the special brotherhood of hunters that he has coveted since he was a young boy before he was allowed to enter the forest, “whispering to himself: ‘Soon now. Soon now. Just three more years (...) and I will be ten. Then Cass said I could go’” (161). When Isaac finally became ten years old, and then twelve, he finally got his opportunity at shooting a deer and succeeded it. However, his reaction to this momentous event is strange:

“he had already accepted, humbly and joyfully, with abnegation and with pride too; the hands, the touch, the first worthy blood which he had been found at last worthy to draw” (157).

Isaac’s reaction to his first kill is strange. For one, why is pride involved? Could he be proud to finally have become a member of the group and a true hunter, or is he proud to have ended the life of something larger than himself? That he feels “found at last worthy to draw” blood suggests he has been longing for this moment for a long time, which is true, but is it his initiation into the ranks of hunters or his killing of an animal? We are provided with no other insight into Isaac’s feelings of the event, and save for this short line we are only provided with very detailed but objective descriptions of the shooting and bloodletting. On a separate occasion, two years before he shot his first deer, he had the opportunity to shoot another deer with Sam Fathers standing close by. When they hear the flat clap of Walter Ewell’s rifle and the sound of the hunting horn signaling that a deer has been killed, he believes that they have missed their chance. He suddenly becomes impatient and frustrated and exclaims “I’ll never get a shot (...) I’ll never kill one” (167). When he finally does manage to get his long-desired kill, he is seemingly rid of all emotion. Curiously, he accepts it with abnegation meaning that, for whatever reason, he is reluctant to fully give in to what he has done. Is this a sign of fear, of regret, or humility?

As we are already familiar with, the “ancient rules” dictate that the hunter must be enduring and show humility. Isaac does indeed possess the necessary humility, but he lacks in being enduring. When he had an opportunity two years ago and missed it, he showed neither quality, acting like an all too eager child. The next time around, he shows pride upon killing the deer, the same damning pride that General Compson possesses when he claims to have injured Old Ben, and that Major de Spain displays when he commits the hubris of enforcing his human rules upon nature. It is the pride that alienates the hunter from nature, and Isaac, because he is a McCaslin and also from the same stock of hunters as Major de Spain and

General Compson and partly raised in that environment, he cannot shake away his pride at the crucial moment of his initiation. His reaction confirms that Isaac does not have it in him to be a true hunter, an early warning that Isaac does not have what it takes to save the wilderness from Major de Spain and the others. He possesses the humility the ancient rules require, but not the endurance. It is the McCaslin heritage and his tutelage under Sam Fathers that drives this split into Isaac's attitude as a hunter. Isaac is, despite wishing different, a McCaslin with McCaslin blood, a bloodline riddled with sin and exploitation of both man and land and, try as he might to change it by remaining passive, he cannot.

Isaac's passivity is not only because of his belonging to both nature and to men, but also an inherent impossibility in the culture he was born into. He wants to be a hunter, to be part of the group that he has coveted since he was a young child. However, he also wishes to save the forest and Old Ben, an attitude possibly instilled through the teachings of Sam Fathers. Having long believed that their yearly chase for Old Ben was simply a rendezvous or tradition, Major de Spain's decision to finally kill the bear has a shattering effect on him: It is the defining moment where it becomes clear for Isaac that his wishes to become a hunter and wanting to preserve nature are incompatible desires. Isaac's passivity is not simply due to his contrastive connections to both nature and men, but also because he is born into a world with contrastive rules. Realizing that nature preservation and human nature are oppositional in his culture, the only possible action left for him is to remain passive.

Killing Old Ben

In the previous chapter, the point was made that the death of Old Ben was an inevitability from the moment men with axes started gnawing at the edges of the forest, and that it was not necessarily the cunning and skill of the hunters that begat the end of the bear. It was also briefly suggested that the death of the great bear was by his own will as he is the guardian of

the forest and is omniscient when he is within its borders. This is something that bears more discussion, as I believe the death of Old Ben can also be viewed as an act of assisted suicide.

It may initially seem sensational to call the death of a bear assisted suicide when it is killed by a group of hunters. There are numerous obstacles in the way of this argument: An animal does not have the ability to commit suicide, let alone convey a desire to be euthanized, to say nothing of the fact that assisted suicide is a purely human phenomenon. To show compassion, an animal might be “put down” when it is in pain, but, as already clearly shown, Old Ben is something much bigger than just an animal. In everything related to the bear, he seems more human than animal by being autonomous and having a will of his own. Old Ben is so much like a human that Faulkner, and even most critics, use the masculine personal pronoun when talking about him instead of the neuter, despite being an animal. The first time he is mentioned, Faulkner tells us that Old Ben, “in an area almost a hundred miles square had earned for himself a name, a definite designation like a living man” (182-83). Lydenberg, in “Nature Myth in Faulkner’s ‘The Bear’ “, also sets Old Ben apart from the other animals: “(...) he is truly animistic, possessing a soul of his own, initiating action, not inert like other creatures of nature” (65). Old Ben is the only creature in the forest, apart from the humans, that is capable of expressing his will. However, because he is an animal and cannot express himself in human terms, he relies on his connections to Sam and Isaac to convey his thoughts: “That’s why it must be one of us. So it wont be until the last day. When even he dont want it to last any longer” (201). Old Ben wants it to end on his terms, so he seeks help from Isaac and Sam. Although Isaac, as always, remains passive, Sam recruits Lion and sets the wheels in motion for the death of Old Ben. After Boon has dealt the killing blow to Old Ben, the bear’s final act further solidifies him as both human and the spirit of the forest: “The bear surged erect, raising with it the man and the dog too, and turned and still carrying the man and

the dog it took two or three steps towards the woods on its hind feet as a man would have walked and crashed down (...) It fell all of a piece, as a tree falls” (228).

Conclusion

There is indeed a vast amount of value to be found in Faulkner's fictional county, the function of place and environments being just one topic worth examining. When done well, a sense of place represents home, culture, identity, time and change all in one, and when done to perfection, it forges lasting imprints in our hearts. The most important function of place is beautifully put by Welty, it being "the ball of golden thread to carry us there and back and in every sense of the word to bring us home" (129, *Place in Fiction*). This is precisely the reason why such southern works such as *Go Down, Moses* cannot be transposed elsewhere in the United States, or anywhere else in the world for that matter, and still retain the same quality. There is no place like home, and there is no place quite like the South.

Faulkner also delineates for us a people and an environment that have become unable to partake peacefully in nature. Because of their flaws and failed interactions, man and nature are inherently incompatible, suggesting that man cannot interact peacefully with nature due to our unchanging and unredeemable qualities. Nature and man are opposed in both physical space, in their direct interactions with the forest and in their attitudes towards a peaceful and symbiotic coexistence. At the root of this fall from nature is the hunter's inability to follow the ancient rules of nature. Being "humble and enduring enough" is a phrase that strikes the reader at the beginning of "The Bear". It is a phrase that captures the qualities that are central throughout the story, and largely throughout all the other stories as well. Being "humble and enduring enough" are the necessary qualities for the hunters of The Big Bottom, Faulkner's mythical woodlands, in order to participate in the hunt. It is an ancient agreement and pact between those who belong outside nature and wish to enter, and the guardian spirit that protects the forest, the great bear by the name Old Ben. It is also the qualities that Isaac 'Ike' McCaslin, the young male descendent of the long-time plantation

owning McCaslin family, strives for as he matures as a hunter according to the old rules set in place long before him, “the ancient and immitigable rules which voided all regrets and brooked no quarter” (182). However, being humble and enduring has been substituted for vanity and greed, and the rules of nature have been substituted for human rules. *Go Down, Moses* and its characters work as a larger metaphor, telling us that man’s distressed approach to nature is inherently dualistic and dubious. The recruitment of Lion, the half-wild, half-tame beast, is a strong point in the case of man being removed from nature in that the only way they can directly interact with Old Ben and nature is through the aid of a mongrel dog belonging neither to the human world nor the wilderness.

The established function of hunting is ever-changing in *Go Down, Moses*. Whether it is hunting for a runaway slave in “Was”, or Lucas Beauchamp hunting for buried gold in “The Fire and The Hearth”, someone, somewhere, is hunting for something, usually for something that they believe will give them great value, but always finding the result to be harmful. Hunting is pervasive in the stories found within *Go Down, Moses*, but its function is certainly most varied in “The Bear”. Before Old Ben supposedly broke the artificial rules made by Major de Spain by killing his colt, the hunt for the great bear was more a tradition than an act exploitative of nature. Although claiming to act in self defense and to protect their livestock and property, the hunting party’s challenging the bear was most certainly motivated more from revenge than self-preservation. The fast and gruesome death of Old Ben is anything but analogous to the death of the landscape that led to the bear’s demise, which was a slow but unrelenting gnawing at the edges of the bear’s domain to the point that the bear saw fit to strike back, giving the humans the incentive needed to kill the guardian of the forest. Hunting after the death of the bear seems almost non-existent, Isaac, and old man, being the only member left to continue the hollow tradition of the yearly November hunt. The steady gnawing of the wilderness has pushed its edges even farther over the years, pushing the deer

and does and fawns, the only thing worth fighting for, farther and farther away. At this point, hunting has little more than symbolic value, and for Isaac the sweet addition of nostalgia as well as he sleeps on his old iron spring cot, thinking about the old majestic forest that once was something more than just a distant memory growing more distant each year.

Isaac is generally passive, but he does have one redeeming quality: His naiveté and idealism. It is present in the strong desire to repudiate his McCaslin inheritance, wishing to give up the land he was to own. More acutely, it shows in the way he deals with fear. While the forest was “punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness” (183), Isaac does not approach it with the same ferocious mentality. He enters it willingly, even alone and without help just to meet with the great bear himself. When the forest is nearing its end and Isaac has realized that Lion will be the tool to help end it, “he should have feared and hated Lion” (183), but he does not. While the other men who are not connected seem to fear nature, Isaac shows courage and trust. Perhaps Isaac, despite being largely silent, gives us the best advice and hope for maintaining a connection to nature.

In *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Faulkner is said to have invented voices for his characters “ranging from sages to children, criminals, the insane, even the dead—sometimes all within one book. He developed, beyond this ventriloquism, his own unmistakable narrative voice, urgent, intense, highly rhetorical” (Norton 1040). Of these qualities, Faulkner’s urgency seems the most immediate. He writes with a speed that attempts to discern what is within our hearts, a speed that made Flannery O’Connor liken him to a locomotive, “the Dixie Limited that no author should stall his mule and wagon on”. By Faulkner’s own admission, his speed was necessary for him to reach what he believed to be the goal of fiction, to “catch the fluidity which is human life and focus a light on it and you stop it long enough for people to be able to see it” (Faulkner in the University). In an

interview with *The Paris Review*, Faulkner's stated that "A writer is trying to create believable people in credible moving situations in the most moving way he can". He also stated that:

The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life. Since man is mortal, the only immortality possible for him is to leave something behind him that is immortal since it will always move. This is the artist's way of scribbling 'Kilroy was here' on the wall of the final and irrevocable oblivion through which he must someday pass. (*The Paris Review*)

Through works such as *Go Down, Moses*, with its unending environments and deep characters, Faulkner has certainly left his mark on his "own little postage stamp of native soil". He has created a county and a body of work that proved unable to be exhausted not only during his lifetime, but remaining to be so long after his death as well.

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